

**Interview with Ruth Jackson**  
**November 3, 2003**  
**Interviewer: Barbara Dickerman**

- Dickerman: This is Barbara Dickerman in Springfield, Illinois. I'm speaking to Ruth Jackson of 1703 East Capitol, on November the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2003. Good afternoon, Ruth.
- Jackson: Hi, Babs.
- Dickerman: And I'd like to ask you what brought you to Springfield, and when did you come?
- Jackson: I came in 1954 with my cousins. I just was doing nothing, and so I came to Springfield and thought I'd go to business school.
- Dickerman: And that was before you were married.
- Jackson: That's correct.
- Dickerman: And what business school did you go to?
- Jackson: Brown's Business College.
- Dickerman: I remember that. Where did you live when you first came to Springfield, Ruth?
- Jackson: I lived on North 15<sup>th</sup> Street, with my cousins. And then they moved to East Stuart Street, in the 2000 [twenty hundred] block of East Stuart Street.
- Dickerman: And you just moved with them.
- Jackson: Yes.
- Dickerman: I see. Then how long did you go – you got a job after you left Brown's, I suppose.
- Jackson: Well –
- Dickerman: Or did you get married first?
- Jackson: I was working when I was going to Brown's. I worked at St. Nick's Hotel, and went to school at night – taking a secretarial course. And of

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course – I met my husband and got married before I finished the business course, so –

Dickerman: That's interesting. And so then, when you got married, did you continue to work?

Jackson: Well, after I had my third child, I went to work at St. John's Hospital. And I worked there for twenty-seven years.

Dickerman: And where did you live after you got married?

Jackson: We lived in the John Hay Homes.

Dickerman: I understood that you – were you in the John Hay Homes for a long time?

Jackson: Well, until my third – well, the fourth child was born, and then we moved onto East Capitol Street, a block down from where we now live. And that's where all my other children were born. And then we built the house where we are now.

Dickerman: You're still living in that neighborhood.

Jackson: Yes. We've been in the same neighborhood.

Dickerman: Maybe tell a little bit about what the John Hay Homes were like in the fifties. I know they were well-built.

Jackson: They were – well-built, and well-managed. But they had a tyrant for the manager person over there. And you just had to keep your yard so, and they'd come in and check your apartments, and you had to make sure that everything was clean. Cause if he came and found any spots on the wall, he'd make you wash all the walls over.

Dickerman: I had heard that. And that is interesting. So then – did you build a house on East Capitol, or was that an existing – ?

Jackson: Well, we – we rented on East Capitol. And then we bought the house from the lady. She lived next door to us. And then we bought the house on a contract. And then we bought the lot down the street from that house, which is where we live today. It was a vacant lot. And we bought the lot, and then after urban renewal came through, we decided to build on our lot.

Dickerman: I see. Would that be – your first house was right there on 18<sup>th</sup> and Capitol?

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Jackson: That's correct. But it was the second house from 18<sup>th</sup> – I mean from Martin Luther King, is what it is now. The lady we bought the house from lived on the corner, and we lived next door.

Dickerman: So how many years did you live there before you built the house?

Jackson: We lived there about five years, I guess.

Dickerman: How about the neighbors that you had there? Do any of them still exist, or did you have good neighbors?

Jackson: Well, the lady passed away, that we bought the house from. And then some of the other neighbors moved out after that – you know after urban renewal came through they moved most of the people out. And the reason we're still there was we had the lot down the street, and we just built a house down the street from where we lived.

Dickerman: But you had the foresight to buy that lot.

Jackson: Yes.

Dickerman: I see. And I'm guessing that that area is where Comer Cox Park is now.

Jackson: Yes.

Dickerman: The children then, did they get to school age while you lived in that first house? Where did they go to school?

Jackson: Yes. They went to Lincoln School.

Dickerman: And can you name any neighbors?

Jackson: Well, the Olivers and the Gaytons. Of course the Gaytons are still there; they lived down the block from me, so when I built my house, I built the house right down from them, you know, a block – a house away. So they are still there.

Dickerman: Oh, so they still – still there. And what is their name again?

Jackson: Well her name is Filler now, but it was Gayton.

Dickerman: Oh, Gayton. G-A-Y.

Jackson: G-A-Y-T-O-N. Gayton.

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Dickerman: I see.

Jackson: And of course, all the kids still call her Mrs. Gayton because they knew her as Mrs. Gayton when they were little kids, and she'd just laugh and answer.

Dickerman: I see. Comer Cox Park – we can go into urban renewal on that a little bit later. So your career then: You continued to work at – when did you move to St. John's for a job?

Jackson: Well, I – I went to St. John's when – when Terri was about a year old, or a little older. And I worked there until I had kidney failure. So I worked there about twenty-seven years.

Dickerman: What did you do there, Ruth?

Jackson: I was a nursing assistant, but I worked in the obstetric department, so it was kind of a specialized area; and one I thoroughly enjoyed, cause I loved all the babies.

Dickerman: Oh, I'll bet you did. And I'm digressing a second – you didn't know a woman named Mary Fearon, that was also a nursing assistant at the A.R.O.N.?

Jackson: You know I remember –

Dickerman: She's from Ireland.

Jackson: I remember the name. And I'm pretty sure I do remember that.

Dickerman: I'll bet you do.

Jackson: And you had a brother that was a doctor.

Dickerman; That's right.

Jackson: Dr. Drake.

Dickerman: Yes, he was there then too.

Jackson: I knew him.

Dickerman: But this was my – kind of a relative by marriage. And she's like you are that she loved the babies. That's why she's enjoyed being there. So that was a great career for raising kids. Did you maybe have your own babies there, when you were working there?

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- Jackson: Yes, I did. In fact –
- Dickerman: The last couple?
- Jackson: Well, I had the last four while I was working there.
- Dickerman: So you probably got VIP treatment? I'll bet you did.
- Jackson: Well, it was kind of interesting. With my last one, I worked the night before, and – I was in early labor all the time; and so when I got ready to go off of work in the morning, they said, "You'd better check in upstairs. I don't think you'd better leave."
- Dickerman: How many children do you have, Ruth?
- Jackson: I had six children. I lost a daughter.
- Dickerman: And mostly girls.
- Jackson: Yes. I had two boys, and then I had four girls.
- Dickerman: I thought I'd remembered that, but I wasn't sure. The children went to Lincoln School. Where I met you was in the Project Area Council, I think, on urban renewal.
- Jackson: Yes.
- Dickerman: So maybe we would talk a little bit about that, because I'm sure you know more than I do. Urban renewal came in – what would you say was the year they started talking about it? What would you say was the year?
- Jackson: Must have been the late fifties, I'm sure. I can't remember the exact date, but it was in the late fifties.
- Dickerman: And then it took some while for it to get going.
- Jackson: Yes.
- Dickerman: The Project Area Council: was that the first kind of council, or group, that – a neighborhood group, that they had? Or was there some forerunner to that? That's the only one I know.
- Jackson: That was – that's the first one, because Jack kind of started, you know, talking about what was going to happen and everything, you know, and –

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Dickerman: And who is Jack?

Jackson: Jack Pettiford.

Dickerman: Oh, Jack Pettiford. I see. He was kind of a community worker and organizer.

Jackson: Yes.

Dickerman: Of that time. Do you feel that maybe you wouldn't have gotten as much input without working with Jack? Did he maybe –

Jackson: I'm sure we wouldn't have known as much if it had not been for him, cause he was very vocal, and he kind of was a person that just searched till he found answers.

Dickerman: The answers for the people that lived there, with the city council.

Jackson: Yes.

Dickerman: Who was the mayor at that time?

Jackson: Telford, I think, was the mayor.

Dickerman: Oh. Was his name William Telford?

Jackson: William Telford.

Dickerman: And the Project Area Council, can you think of some of the people that were active in it?

Jackson: Art Ferguson was very active. And of course Juanita was always involved, and her brother.

Dickerman: Juanita –

Jackson: Juanita Borden now.

Dickerman: Oh yes. She had – she was Juanita Smith then, was she?

Jackson: She was Juanita Dewith.

Dickerman: And I remembered a man named Calvert Occomy. Does that ring a bell with you?

Jackson: Yes. Calvert Occomy was very –

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Dickerman: Was Simeon Osby part of that?

Jackson: And Simeon was a part of that as well.

Dickerman: How often would they meet? Just when they needed – there was an issue, or – ?

Jackson: Well, they used to meet monthly.

Dickerman: Monthly. Where would they meet, Ruth?

Jackson: Well, they – they met at the American Legion, when they first started. That was before they moved from 11<sup>th</sup> – between and 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Street on Monroe; and then they built down on 18<sup>th</sup>, where they are now. And then when they weren't there anymore, then they would meet at the Community Action Agency, which was at 16<sup>th</sup> and Capitol.

Dickerman: I see. That's – American Legion is another part of history.

Jackson: Yes.

Dickerman: Where was it? Was that the old farmhouse, or not?

Jackson: No. No, the American Legion was on Monroe Street between 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Street – on Monroe.

Dickerman: Does it exist today, the building?

Jackson: No, that's all torn down. And that's in the new area over there – it would be right down from probably where the health clinic is now, around that area.

Dickerman: Which is at 11<sup>th</sup> and Monroe right now.

Jackson: Well it – they – they – the clinic is at 11<sup>th</sup> and Monroe, but they were the next block up; they were on 12<sup>th</sup>.

Dickerman: And then urban renewal: would they have gotten some urban renewal funds to move the Legion over to 18<sup>th</sup>?

Jackson: I'm sure they did, cause they did give most of the people that were moved, you know, some type of replacement funds. And I'm sure that Art, and those guys that were involved, saw that they got their share of whatever was coming; and that's how they were able to probably build the new American Legion down at 18<sup>th</sup> and Capitol.

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- Dickerman: Was Art Ferguson an architect? I thought he was.
- Jackson: Yes, he was.
- Dickerman: Oh. Thought so. Do you think the people involved in that Project Area Council felt that they got what was coming to them from the city and the federal government?
- Jackson: No, they did not. They felt like they had to fight for everything they got. Because once the federal money started coming into the city, the mayor was probably over most of the projects, and they'd kind of do whatever they wanted to do – was the way we – most of us felt, you know. And we got the crumbs that was left over.
- Dickerman: So then people – had to move out.
- Jackson: Yes.
- Dickerman: Everybody maybe wasn't as fortunate as you, to stay in the neighborhood.
- Jackson: No, there were a lot of people that had to move. They were led to believe they were getting better places than what they had. And of course they did get better housing. But, if you've been in a neighborhood for so long, and you're comfortable there, it's kind of hard to have to uproot from all your friends and things. I think it made it pretty hard for some of the older people that were displaced – more or less.
- Dickerman: I'm thinking about Grace Methodist Church, across the street from you. Was that there in those days?
- Jackson: No, Grace Church moved from where New Hope Baptist Church is now. Grace used to be on that corner.
- Dickerman: What would be the corner?
- Jackson: It was at 15<sup>th</sup> and Jackson Street.
- Dickerman: Was that a result of – did they maybe possibly get funds from urban renewal to build Grace Methodist Church?
- Jackson: No, I don't – I don't think so. They probably were able to get the property at a reduced rate, cause I think a lot of those places – even because they were building – got the land for a dollar, probably, or



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something. You know how they – if you build within a certain span of time, they would give you the property to build on.

Dickerman: Oh, is that how it worked?

Jackson: Yes.

Dickerman: I see.

Jackson: A lot of the people got the land that way.

Dickerman: And then your house was torn down by urban renewal. Had you long since moved out of that first house?

Jackson: No, it was torn down by urban renewal.

Dickerman: How did Comer Cox Park come about? Did the neighbors have to work hard to get that? Or was it something that was in the plans?

Jackson: No, that was just something in the plan. Like I say, the powers-that-be made all the decisions; and a lot of things were just there – when we knew anything, we were getting this park.

Dickerman: Do you feel that has been a good thing for the neighborhood?

Jackson: Well, I think – as it worked out, it has been a good thing. But at first it was just really – a worry because there were a lot of problems with the park being there. But now that they've got things worked out, it has worked out fine for the neighborhood.

Dickerman: I was thinking that you were involved with Imani, Ruth – Imani organization, at one time. Did you work with that?

Jackson: I'm still a board member of Imani. And we still are in existence, just hanging on by a thread. And of course, since I've been in here, you know, everything happened; and so the other board members will call me, and we'll have a conference call. So I'm still involved with Imani.

Dickerman: And what is Imani?

Jackson: It's a social service agency. Actually, five of us women got together and decided we needed something to help the under-privileged – and of course most of us were in as bad a shape as the people we were helping, but – we thought that a lot of people were intimidated by having to go downtown, to ask for help, and a lot of things; and we thought that if we could get something in the neighborhood, they

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would be more comfortable, talking to us than they would – And so it has worked out for us. But like I say, it's hard; and competition for funds is getting harder and harder, so we're just hanging on by a thread. But we keep saying that the Lord didn't bring us this far to leave us. So we think we'll be able to hang in there.

Dickerman: When did you start that, Ruth?

Jackson: It's been fifteen years.

Dickerman: I see. That's pretty good. I had a vague feeling it started in your church, Monroe Street Christian. Am I wrong?

Jackson: No, it didn't start in Monroe Christian Church. Now I worked with another agency that – the Inner-City Mission; now at one time, they were located in my church, in the old sanctuary area for a while, until we got the place up on 5<sup>th</sup> Street.

Dickerman: And you were involved in Inner-City Mission also?

Jackson: Yes. Of course that was through the church organization, and so I was one of the church members. The different churches had, you know, chairwomen, they called them, that worked –

Dickerman: What did they call them?

Jackson: They were chairwomen.

Dickerman: Chairwomen. I see.

Jackson: From their churches.

Dickerman: To run Inner-City Mission.

Jackson: To help with their organization and stuff, because they did hire somebody right away once they found a place to have it. And so what we did was try to gather supplies, and that type of stuff for the Inner-City Mission. So I was one of the women from our church that worked on that committee.

Dickerman: So you started two organizations, at least – if not more, Ruth. Did anything go on in the John Hay Homes, as far as social service organizations, or social – when you lived there, way back in the fifties?

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- Jackson: No, there wasn't anything there. But now when Imani first started, we did have a place in – in John Hay [Homes] that we worked out of. They let us use a couple of the housing units to run our program out of.
- Dickerman: Oh, I see.
- Jackson: As an in-kind donation. So that really was a big help. We didn't have to pay any rent, or anything, getting started. And it helped a lot of their clients, so you know.
- Dickerman: I can see that. I had heard that at one time the John Hay Homes was sort of segregated by streets – way back. Do you remember that that was true? Or was it mixed?
- Jackson: Well, it was probably before I moved in there, because when I moved in there it was just kind of mixed. But I had heard that also, when I first came to Springfield, and heard about the John Hay Homes. But when I moved over there, there were a lot of people that – though the Concordia students were there. And so my neighborhood was more or less a mixed neighborhood, but most of the people that were there were Concordia students.
- Dickerman: Oh. Now what was Concordia?
- Jackson: It was the Concordia Seminary.
- Dickerman: But was that Lutheran?
- Jackson: Lutheran, yes. The Lutheran seminary.
- Dickerman: And they had – I had heard that they had reserved apartments for some of those students.
- Jackson: Yes, for their students.
- Dickerman: I remember hearing that. I wasn't sure if that were true. Now, about Monroe Street Christian: was that always your church, Ruth – when you first came to town?
- Jackson: Well, when I first came to town, as I said, I came and lived with my cousins. And they attended St. John's AME, and so I went to church with them. And then after I got married, well, my husband's cousins belonged to Monroe Street Christian, and of course, I had gone to a Christian church at home, and so I started going to church with them. And that's how I got started to going to Monroe Christian.

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Dickerman: Has that always been in that location? What are the streets? It's on Monroe, and between what?

Jackson: It's between 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Street, on Monroe.

Dickerman: And that goes way back to fifties or sixties – that building?

Jackson: Well, they were in a house when I first came. It was like an old house. They had services. It was an upstairs and a downstairs, and they had their services on the lower level, you know – the first floor.

Dickerman: In that same address.

Jackson: At that address. Uh-huh. 1229 East Monroe.

Dickerman: Did urban renewal affect them – that church, in any way?

Jackson: Well, they tore down the buildings. And of course that gave them a chance – well, they owned the property there, and so it gave them an opportunity to have more expansion there. And then they were able to acquire a couple other lots, so that's why we have the whole space we do have there now.

Dickerman: I wondered about that. I also – I think that some of your children went to the City Day School, which was a new school in Springfield.

Jackson: Yes.

Dickerman: Be interesting to hear more.

Jackson: Well, one of the teachers at Lincoln School was a friend of Allen Paul, who was the president of the City Day School; and she had encouraged my son to go – my second son. He was on the higher track. You know they had him on different tracks, and that. And so he was always real easy to catch onto things, and she thought it would be nice if he would go there. So he went there a year, and he didn't like it because he was away from all of his friends, and he said, "I think my sisters would like to go here." So he pushed it off on his younger sisters. So I had two daughters to go there: Jennifer and Vanessa both went to City Day.

Dickerman: And where was that located?

Jackson: It was on South Grand –

Dickerman: Was it Lincoln or Douglas? It was a big mansion, wasn't it?

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Jackson: Yeah, it was a big mansion. And I'm trying to remember the name of the mansion, but I can't remember the name of it. But it was a big mansion, and they had the school in there. And it worked fine for me, because we were right on the bus line, so the girls got on the bus at home, and they just got off in front of the school. So it worked out real well for me, that I didn't have to worry about them transferring downtown.

Dickerman: Was that a private school?

Jackson: Yes, it was a private school. And so they were there on scholarship.

Dickerman: So your girls did well there.

Jackson: Yeah.

Dickerman: I thought that some of them had gone there. I didn't know if Terri had or not.

Jackson: No, Terri wasn't one of the fortunate ones – or unfortunate. Thank God at the time. My little one just cried cause she got – made her go there, and took her away from all of her friends. "I hate you!"

Dickerman: Oh, but then were they glad.

Jackson: It was so funny. When she graduated from there, she wrote me the nicest card, and she said, "I remember the day you made me go to school, and I hated it, and I said I hated you and I hated the school, and I hated all the kids." And she said, "And you said to me: Someday you'll thank me for this." And she said, "So I guess this is my day to say thank you."

Dickerman: That is nice.

Jackson: So I've kept that card all the time. Can I hold this over her head?

Dickerman: How many of your children still live in Springfield?

Jackson: Three.

Dickerman: I see.

Jackson: The two boys, and Terri.

Dickerman: In all those years, living there – it was the years when things changed in Springfield, as far as discrimination was concerned. Did you – did you feel deep discrimination, or what were your feelings?

Jackson: You know I – I never felt deep discrimination, I guess you would say, because my parents always taught me that, you know, you're just as good as anybody else. And I thought I was. I didn't know any better. In fact, I laugh about it. I told them: When I was growing up, we I lived on my grandfather's farm. He had a farm. And so we had everything we needed, and I didn't think I was under-privileged. I didn't have good sense to know any different. (laughs.)

Dickerman: Well that – that's great.

Jackson: And of course, my children – you know, I told them that they never had everything they wanted, but they had what their needs were, you know. And so they never felt that much – sometimes they'd whine about stuff, and I'd say, "Well you have what you need." I said, "You know there's a difference in needs and wants."

Dickerman: Were they involved in the school desegregation that took place in 1976? Were they pretty much through school – through grade school by then?

Jackson: Yes.

Dickerman: Were they? Your children, right? As mine were. Yeah, they were into high school, well, into high school, too. Do you have any thoughts on how that worked – the school desegregation? I think it was 1976. Am I wrong?

Jackson: Well, it was around that time. Sure. But like I say, when they went to Lincoln School it was almost all black anyway. There were very few, other than the black kids out and around there. And of course, my son – it was so funny; we laugh about it now – at the time, he didn't know that when they was degrading to call somebody – calling him nigger. So he – he thought that was cursing. So one day it was real funny, one of the little kids that played with him down the street made him mad – and this kid was blond-headed, blue-eyed – and he called him "Nigger, go home," he said.

Dickerman: Your son said to him.

Jackson: Yeah. He said, "I cussed him out and sent him home." I said, "Oh my Lord." We laugh about that now. It's so funny. He said, "Well I didn't

know any difference.” He said, “I thought that was cursing.” He said, “I thought I’d learned a curse word.”

Dickerman: That’s good, Ruth. There on Capitol, did you have neighborhood things? Oh, get-togethers, or – as all the families were probably pretty good friends.

Jackson: Well they all – all were.

Dickerman: Were there a lot of kids? Or more older people?

Jackson: There were a lot of young kids there when I first moved in the neighborhood, because the Wades lived across the street from me, and they had quite a few children. And then, like I said, then that Mrs. – the Gaytons, they lived on Adams Street, and then they moved off of Adams Street down there on Capitol, and they had a bunch of children. And then there was another lady that lived there, Mrs. Oliver; and she had a whole bunch of boys. There were just a bunch of kids on our street.

Dickerman: Oh, so that was good for your kids.

Jackson: Yeah.

Dickerman: And they could walk to school.

Jackson: Yeah, they walked to school, and everything. And so it was real nice. And then, of course, I would walk my kids to school. But my oldest son, he was scared to go by himself anywhere, and so we walked him to school. And then after he got in about the second grade, he’d say, “You don’t need to walk me all the way there.” And he’d try to make me go back – he’d get two blocks from school, he didn’t want the kids to see me walking to school with him.

Dickerman: I know, cause I had boys. They’re very much that way. Here are us, two women talking: I didn’t ask about your husband’s name. We have to go back to when you got married.

Jackson: Well, his name is George. George Sidney. And they called him Sid, most of the people did. And he’s from Missouri.

Dickerman: And where did you meet George?

Jackson: I met him here in Springfield. I worked at the Leland Hotel. I mean I worked at the St. Nicholas Hotel, and he worked at the Leland Hotel, so a lot of times we would go downtown, to Kresge’s, or someplace, at

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lunchtimes. So ran into him one day at Kresge's. We were having lunch, and I guess he and his friend were just downtown walking around on their break. And so they knew my cousin. So they asked me about her, and different things; and then they started asking her different things about me. And so finally he and I met, and so we started dating after that.

Dickerman: That's what I should have asked you in the first place. But you had so many other things to say, Ruth. What did George do then, in later years? Well I know he's a barbeque person. He likes to do that.

Jackson: Well, he worked at the Leland until it closed. And then he went out to the Holiday Inn, and worked out there. And that's where he retired from.

Dickerman: I see.

Jackson: Was the Holiday Inn.

Dickerman: And we would say that – what we're trying to get history – the Leland probably closed about – what year, do you know?

Jackson: I can't remember.

Dickerman: I was thinking maybe 1965.

Jackson: Somewhere along there, yes. And then –

Dickerman: The Leland Hotel was located where?

Jackson: At 6<sup>th</sup> and Capitol.

Dickerman: And the Holiday Inn was out on Dirksen.

Jackson: Yes.

Dickerman: And that closed just recently.

Jackson: Yes.

Dickerman: That's interesting. I'm afraid to stop it. I will stop it, then we can think of –

*[interview resumes]*



Dickerman: I'm thinking about any fun things that you did in those years when you were married. I know you were working, and had six children. But were there clubs?

Jackson: Yes, we did. And of course, when my parents passed away, I had my younger brothers and sisters as well. And so they were older – the girls were old enough they could watch the kids, you know, when we'd do things. And so we this young group of young women got together, and we called ourselves the Young Beauties. And so we'd always – once a month, we'd go out someplace; dress up and go out to eat, or something. So we'd try to – taste all the different fancy eating places in town. We'd save our money and go out to eat. And that was a lot of fun. And then about every six months or so, we'd have a party of some kind. So we'd dress up, and – one time we had a luau, and another time we had a roaring twenties party. So a couple of months ago, my little granddaughter was looking at some pictures, and she said, "Why, Nana, that looks like you."

Dickerman: In the roaring twenties costume?

Jackson: Yeah.

Dickerman: Oh – fun!

Jackson: So she got a big laugh out of that.

Dickerman: Would that be – would you go out with your husbands? Or you just let the husbands stay home and babysit?

Jackson: Well that was a time when the husbands took care of the kids, and we girls all got to go out for dinner.

Dickerman: Now, I know some of your daughters. But I was just wondering you're your different children are doing – the ones that live in Springfield?

Jackson: Well, you know Terri's out at the university.

Dickerman: And what does Terri do?

Jackson: Now, Terri's job – I can never keep up with what she does. She's in minority services out there.

Dickerman: I see. And has been for quite some time.

Jackson: Yes. And then my son, Eugene: he has his bachelors from UIS; and he works for the state, in public aid, or someplace. They kind of shift him

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around too, so I never know exactly what they're doing. But he's been working at the state. And then my other son: he lived in Milwaukee for a while, and then he moved back to Springfield. He had some emotional problems and stuff, so he's on medication. And he lives in one of the high rise buildings; he's able to care for himself, but...

Dickerman: And how many grandchildren do you have, Ruth?

Jackson: I have three grandchildren, and one great granddaughter.

Dickerman: I see. And your other daughters live where? Vanessa is one.

Jackson: Vanessa, my youngest daughter, lives in Atlanta, Georgia. And she's a clinical social worker. And she has her own business now, and she does counseling, and that. And then, of course, she gets different grants, and she's very involved with mental health issues. And so right now, she and other lady are working on a project they're going to be doing in Australia. So she gets to go a lot of places. So she enjoys that.

Dickerman: I know she also went to SSU – the old SSU, at one time.

Jackson: Yes, she did.

Dickerman: I thought that she did.

Jackson: Yes, she got her degree from there. She... they... two of my daughters went to Augustana College in Rock Island. And Vanessa went two years, and then she came back to Springfield and went out to...

Dickerman: Oh, I see.

Jackson: Sangamon State. So she went out there and completed her degree. And then after she finished there, she went down to St. Louis to Washington University, and got a degree in social work.

Dickerman: I see. Very interesting. I didn't know what all those kids were doing. I knew some of them. I knew Vanessa.

Jackson: And then Jennifer, she has her degree from Augustana College; and then she works with the state's attorney's office there. She's a liaison between –

Dickerman: In what town?

Jackson: She lives in Moline – Rock Island, Moline area.

Ruth Jackson

Dickerman: So you've been able to keep the same neighborhood through all their lives.

Jackson: Yes.

Dickerman: That's something to be proud of, I would think. Bet they love it.

Jackson: Yeah, they're always excited about coming home. And of course, Terri laughs and calls Jennifer the good daughter, because the youngest daughter is gone all the time; and my husband laughed and said, "Vanessa thinks it's okay if she writes a check and sends it to [unclear]." So he said, "and I keep telling her that she's going to grow old like we are, and she'd better save her money." She might get sick and need it. (laughs.)

Dickerman: It sounds like good advice. And so the park now is something that you enjoy having next door to you? Has it improved? Or you feel it's an asset to your house?

Jackson: Well, now it is.

Dickerman: Comer Cox Park.

Jackson: Comer Cox. When they first built it there, it was a headache; because they would park all up in there, and – you know it was just a rowdy bunch all the time. And so finally they got it to the place that now, you know, they [unclear], because if they park in the alley, they do ticket them now. So those fifty-dollar tickets kind of deter a lot of that.

Dickerman: Oh, that's new. When did that start?

Jackson: Well, they've done that for the last several years. But they're real lenient with them, because they're going to give them the opportunity to move. So they really don't give that many tickets. You know, they'll come through and announce to everybody there to move out, or they'll be ticketed. So most of them just go ahead and move their cars, without any –

Dickerman: I'm thinking now about – remind me of the neighborhood policing. Did that affect your neighborhood when they brought it in? I don't know when – neighborhood policing?

Jackson: Yeah. Well, we are in the area where – I don't see that it does that much good because they're too friendly with the kids. And the young people just think it's a big joke, so they don't pay too much attention, too much.

Ruth Jackson

Dickerman: And Ruth, I know that you were fortunate to get a kidney transplant, but you had to wait some years.

Jackson: Well, I was on dialysis for about seventeen years before I got a transplant. But I was offered one before that. When Jennifer was graduating from college, a transplant became available. But I didn't want to miss her graduation, so I turned it down. They called and said that they thought they had a kidney for me. And did I want to accept it? And I asked them where it was, and they said, "Chicago." I said, "Just give it to somebody else. I've got to wait, cause my daughter's graduating from school, and I've worked hard to get her there, and I want to see her graduate." So I didn't take it.

Dickerman: Well it's – and you've had such success in all of them graduating. That's something to be proud of, Ruth. Well, then, if you didn't take the one when she was graduating, how long did you have to wait for a kidney transplant, Ruth?

Jackson: I had to wait about another five years or more. And then one day I came from church, one Sunday afternoon, and my doctor called me and said, "Are you ready to take care of yourself now? I think we've got a kidney for you." And I said, "Yeah, where is it?" And he said, "In Chicago." And I said, "How long do you want me to be at the hospital?" So he said, "Go on over, and we'll get you all checked out." So I went to the hospital, and then Terri called Jennifer to tell her that they thought they'd found me a kidney. And so about the time they were ready to take me to surgery, she had driven down from Rock Island, and she came in just as they were rolling me out to take me to this surgery for my transplant.

Dickerman: So you went to Chicago?

Jackson: No, they brought – they flew –

Dickerman: Oh, they did it here in Springfield.

Jackson: Yes, they flew the kidney here. I got the transplant at Memorial.

Dickerman: Maybe we should say who your doctor was, because it's quite unusual that we have all that available, isn't it?

Jackson: Yes. Dr. O'Connor – Timothy O'Connor was my transplant doctor. And when I first was getting ready for the transplant, then Dr. Burch was the transplant doctor.

Ruth Jackson

Dickerman: Well Ruth, it's so interesting to hear all of these things. (break in tape) I'm going back to talking about the urban renewal days, in probably the sixties and into the seventies. And who was mayor at that time? You said it was William Telford?

Jackson: Yes.

Dickerman: How did you view the city council in those days? It was a different city council.

Jackson: Well it was very dictatorial, I thought. And of course, we had lots of fights; but we always got things ironed out. That's because there were so many people that were very vocal about how they felt about things. And I tell you: I think a lot of times we almost made the mayor have a heart attack.

Dickerman: So if you didn't organize, you'd probably feel you would not have gotten as much.

Jackson: No, I don't think we would have.

Dickerman: Was it something though that the federal government – they sort of mandated that Project Area Council – did they not?

Jackson: Yeah, they mandated that the area residents be involved, so it was something they couldn't get around.

Dickerman: Can you think of the other – there were five council members – because that was called council government, instead of aldermanic government. Can you think of any of the others that were there?

Jackson: Pat Ward was there. And there was – seemed like a Doyle. I can't –

Dickerman: I can't think either. We should.

Jackson: I think his name was Doyle.

Dickerman: Oh, there was Madonia.

Jackson: Yeah. Well, Madonia's been there forever. Yes. And –

Dickerman: I can't think either. Well, Henneberry – [unclear] at that time?

Jackson: Yes, Henneberry was there.

Ruth Jackson

Dickerman: He's – they're all still living, I think. And it hasn't been that long that we've changed. Yes, an aldermanic government has been – we've had about ten or twelve years. Do you see a difference in that, Ruth?

Jackson: Well, I guess there's a difference. But still there's a lot of maneuvering, you know. You've got to give something to get something. And so I really don't think it's a whole lot different, because sometimes I think they have to more or less go along with the majority to get their projects done. And you know I don't know if that's good or bad, or otherwise.

Dickerman: Who is your alderman now?

Jackson: Frank McNeil.

Dickerman: And he's been there quite a while.

Jackson: Yeah.

Dickerman: That makes a difference. At least you have one person representing the neighborhood somewhat.

Jackson: Well, it does, until they get to the point that, you know, they owe so many favors that they can't do a whole lot. And I find that's true with a lot of things, when you know you have to bend – and a lot of times if you bend too far, you get to the point that you're not very effective. And I'm just not that kind of person. So I don't think I'd make a very good one.

Dickerman: Thank you, Ruth. That sums up your personality, in some ways. No one could sum up your personality. Thank you, very much.

*[interview resumes]*

Dickerman: We mentioned the Community Action Agency, because the Project Area Council would meet there. What was that group, and where was it?

Jackson: Well it was located at 16<sup>th</sup> and Capitol, at one time. And there was a big building there on the corner, and it was located there. And one of my young brothers worked at Community Action, you know, as a summer student, or – whatever – when they were there. And it was a place to go for different resources. And then I was on one of the committees that worked there. I worked with Edna Gardner there.

Ruth Jackson

Dickerman: Yes, I remember her. And she was an outreach – what kind of things did she do?

Jackson: Well she was more an outreach type person. And of course Edna was a funny person. We always got a big kick out of her. She always had everybody else doing all of her research. (both laugh) She was a smart woman.

Dickerman: So this is another thing you were involved in, Ruth – was the Community Action Agency. Did they have children's programs there that – your children were maybe a little bit older by that time – that kids could go there and do crafts, or – ?

Jackson: Well, they – well, you know I don't recall that they had programs for them to come there and do different things, because most of the things that I recall – the kids just working there, you know, doing different little projects they had for them to work on. But they – I know they did have a cooking class, or something, there. And I don't know if they were for the older women; because I had a friend who was a cook, and she used to cook things there. And that's how I knew about that. But they had different – you know, people would donate clothing, and that kind of stuff, and so they would all – Edna was kind of over that program.

Dickerman: They would dispense it.

Jackson: Yeah, they would dispense that stuff. People could go there for help.

Dickerman: And who was the first director? Who ran it? Was it Theresa Cummings? Or was she later?

Jackson: Well you know, I don't recall anybody else being there other than Theresa.

Dickerman: So she probably was the first director?

Jackson: Yeah, she probably was. Because I – 'cause her parents lived next door to me, and I remember when he was excited about his daughter coming, to run the agency.

Dickerman: Oh, so that's another family on Capitol?

Jackson: Yes. The Cummings.

Dickerman: Now what size of a family did they have?

Ruth Jackson

Jackson: Well it was just him and her, at the time. The children were all grown.

Dickerman: Oh I see. So they didn't grow up on that street.

Jackson: No, they didn't. I don't even know that they grew up on that street, because they – I'm sure they didn't, because he had moved from out on west – what street did he tell me? He lived out west though, on Williams, or some street.

Dickerman: Oh did he? When his children were young. I see.

Jackson: When he was younger.

Dickerman: Because that is a family that I've heard about. I think we will interview Theresa. Well, that makes so many things that you were involved in, Ruth. And we have to keep digging to remind you of how many things you did.

Jackson: I was just saying that – like I said, I was always interested in what was going on. And so I laugh sometimes when my daughter gets all involved in everything. And I said, "I don't know if you're just being nosey, or if you're really concerned." She said, "Well I got all that stuff from you."

Dickerman: It works both ways, doesn't it?

*[end of interview]*