

Daniel Saba: Please begin with your name.

Margaret Seawood: My name is Margaret Wallace Seawood.

Daniel Saba: I'm Daniel Saba interviewing. Could you first begin with some biographical information? Where were you born?

Margaret Seawood: I was born in Memphis in an area in north Memphis called Barrel Water. It's near Chelsea and Second; over in that area.

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Daniel Saba: Who were your parents?

Margaret Seawood: My parents – my father's name was Sydney Wallace and my mother's name was Sarah Wallace.

Daniel Saba: Did you have any siblings?

Margaret Seawood: Yes; I had a brother, Sydney Wallace, Jr. I have a sister, Geraldine Remi. I have another sister, Velma Jones.

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Daniel Saba: Were your parents originally from Memphis or did they move to Memphis?

Margaret Seawood: My mother was born in Memphis and my father was born in Arkansas, Marbyelle, Arkansas near Helena.

Daniel Saba: Why did he move to Memphis do you know?

Margaret Seawood: By the time he got grown enough to work he was living in Earles, Arkansas. His family had moved to Earles, Arkansas. Then he came to Memphis to get a job to work.

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Daniel Saba: Can you tell me a little bit about your neighborhood that you grew up in?

Margaret Seawood: When we moved from Barrel Water I really wasn't old enough to remember it, but we moved to a place still in north Memphis called Moulden Town that was over near Wolf River, where Wolf River goes into the Mississippi River; in that area.

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When I was about eight years old we moved to a place called Dry Bean Par Court and that was sort of in the poor area, very poor area. We lived on a little street called Dry Bean Par Court and had duplex houses on this side of the street and duplex houses on that side and it was a dead end street. Each house had three rooms.

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We always said we had a front room, a middle room and a kitchen. We had no bathroom. We had a toilet and our water was outside in the backyard. There was a toilet, a duplex toilet. One side was for two families and the other side was two families all the way down.

[00:03:00] It was a long row of houses. So whenever we got ready for water or to use the restroom we had to go outside. This was in the city. Not in the country; in the city.

*Daniel Saba:* Were you involved in any activities as a child?

*Margaret Seawood:* Goin' to church and goin' to school.

*Daniel Saba:* What school did you go to?

*Margaret Seawood:* Manassas.

*Daniel Saba:* What role did the church play in your community? Did it play much of a role?

[00:04:00] *Margaret Seawood:* Not really that much. It was a small church and it was made up mostly of families. Sometimes we talk about the different families, but it was maybe about 12-14 families; the husband, wife and children that belonged to this little church. It was a [COGIC](#) church. The people from the neighborhood would come to the services, but they really didn't belong there. A lot of 'em didn't, but they would always come down with services.

*Daniel Saba:* What was school like for you at Manassas?

*Margaret Seawood:* It was good. I think I got a good education there. At that time we started in the 1st grade at Manassas, went on through to junior high, which was 7th and 8th grade and graduated from junior high and went right on through to high, which was from the 9th through 12th grade, but I didn't have to change schools. I just went all the way through Manassas.

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*Daniel Saba:* Did segregation impact your education experience at all?

*Margaret Seawood:* No; I didn't know anything else. When we were growin' up, my father sort of sheltered us. A lot of that we didn't know anything about because he never talked about it too much. As far as we were concerned, he never taught us anything about Black and

White. He never taught us that. So we grew up not knowin' too much.

*Daniel Saba:* So you say you were sheltered. When did you start to see sort of -- ?

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*Margaret Seawood:* Well after I finished Manassas I got a job downtown at Main and Madison at a drug store called **Molsely** Robinson. So I had read in the paper that the movie *King Kong* was comin'<sup>g</sup> to Memphis. The only movie I had ever been to was when they would have movies at school because we weren't allowed to go to movies because of our religion. We weren't allowed to go to movies, dances or anything like that.

So this one time I called myself grown then. I had finished school. I said, 'I'm goin' to see *King Kong*. I don't care what.' So I told my mother that I had to work that Saturday. I really didn't have to work, but I wanted to see that movie so bad

[00:07:00] So I caught the bus, rode downtown and I got off the bus at **Wanna's** Theater on Main Street. They didn't have a mall down there then. It was just a street.

I got to Wanna's Theater. That's where the movie was gonna be shown. I got in line. When I got in line it was just a long line waitin' to get tickets, but I never really paid too much attention that it was nobody in line but White people. I really didn't even think about it. I just went 'cause like I said, I didn't know too much about segregation.

So I just went and stood in line. Nobody said anything to me. I stood in line and we moved up, we moved up. When I got to the window to get my ticket the lady told me, she looked at me and she said, 'You have to go around to the side.'

[00:08:00] Well, I didn't know. When she said I had to go around to the side I just took my money and went on around to the side. The Black people had to go in the side door up the stairs and seated upstairs to see the movie.

So I went on. I saw the movie and came on out. I still didn't think anything about it. I was glad I saw the movie.

*Daniel Saba:* I'd like to move into the 50s to 70s era. What do you remember of that?

*Margaret Seawood:* The 50s. Well I finished high school in 1952. I got a job, like I said, in Mo<sup>l</sup>se<sup>l</sup>y Robinson drugstore. Then I got married in 1954.  
[00:09:00] So I've just spent my time doin' different kinds of work from 1954 to 1964 I'd spent just doin' odd jobs.

As a matter of fact I even chopped cotton after I had married because my husband got laid off and we really didn't have anything. So I said well – 'cause I had been choppin' cotton when I was a teenager growin' up.

[00:10:00] So I went back to goin' to the field catchin' a bus, goin' to the field every day choppin' cotton. Then after I got tired of that I got a job in a little restaurant. So I got tired of that after I worked so long because I was workin' like six days a week and I was makin' three dollars a day for those six days. So I was makin' like \$15.00 to \$18.00 a week.

So then I left there and I got a job at one of the city schools cleanin' up classrooms after school and then just doin' janitorial work. After I had worked there two years I thought, I said it's got to be somethin' better than this for me to do.

So that's when I decided that I was gonna further my education. So I got in contact with Lemoyne College. It was Lemoyne then; it wasn't Lemoyne Owen. Just Lemoyne College. I asked them to send me information and everything. So then they sent me back what I needed to get done to be able to attend Lemoyne.

[00:11:00] Then they wrote me and told me when the entrance exam was gonna be. I went and took the entrance exam. The next thing I know they were sendin' me the papers that I needed to fill out to be able to attend the school.

So in 1964 I started to Lemoyne. I spent four years. In 1968 I graduated. I put in an application to the board of education, Memphis City Schools and they hired me in 1968. At that time I was 33 years old because I started at Lemoyne when I was 29.

[00:12:00] After I graduated from Lemoyne I started teachin'. I taught in the city schools until I reached 60 years old. Then I retired.

*Daniel Saba:* So you were teaching about the same time as school integration was starting. Do you have any experiences with that?

*Margaret Seawood:* Yes. I was teachin' at Florida Street School. That's where I got hired at to go down there and teach. I had been there three years when segregation started. They'd sent mostly Black teachers to White schools for a week to get acquainted with what was goin' on. They sent the White teachers to the Black schools.

[00:13:00] So I exchanged classes with – I think her name was Miss Pendergrass at Hawkins Mill School out in Frasier. So she went to Florida Street School to take my place for a week and I went to Hawkins Mill School to take her place for a week. This was near the end of school.

Then during the summer they made the assignments of where the teachers would go. So when I got my assignment they assigned me to Hawkins Mill School. That's where I stayed until I retired.

*Daniel Saba:* So that was a predominantly White school when you were first teaching there.

*Margaret Seawood:* Yes; when I first went there. In my classroom I think I had somethin' maybe like four or five Black students. The rest of 'em were White.

*Daniel Saba:* Were there any issues with that or were there any difficulties with that situation?

*Margaret Seawood:* For me?

*Daniel Saba:* For you, yes.

*Margaret Seawood:* No; none what so ever. Like I said, I didn't know the difference. They were all children. So I just went in and did what I had to do. No; it wasn't no problem at all; no. I never had a problem with it.

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*Daniel Saba:* Did you notice a period of change from the way things were to bettering of – you were there seeing integration happening for example in the schools, but do you remember where the change was between what it was to what it became?

*Margaret Seawood:* Well, now I had never been to school with White children. I always went with Black. When I went to Lemoyne College I had White teachers. That was very standard. I had White teachers, but it still didn't make a difference; no problem.

*Daniel Saba:* So you said you graduated from Lemoyne in '68.

*Margaret Seawood:* Mhmm.

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*Daniel Saba:* This is the same year I guess of the sanitation worker strike and Martin Luther King coming to Memphis. Do you remember that? Do you have any memories of that?

*Margaret Seawood:* Yeah; I remember it. I remember hearing it on the news and reading it in the newspapers, but I wasn't down there.

*Daniel Saba:* Were you involved in any particular activities? You were teaching, but were you in any organizations or something like that at this time?

*Margaret Seawood:* No. If I were I don't remember it. No.

*Daniel Saba:* What did you do for fun?

*Margaret Seawood:* At what time?

*Daniel Saba:* This adulthood onwards I guess.

*Margaret Seawood:* Well after I got married 'cause I got married when I was 19 years old and we would always go to movies, entertain ourselves at home. We didn't have much to do a whole lot with.  
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*Daniel Saba:* So you mentioned your first movie theater experience. That was also your first encounter with segregation.

*Margaret Seawood:* Yes; except the times that sometimes we would ride the bus to go downtown, just do some shoppin' or somethin' and we would naturally have to go to the back of the bus. If the bus was full and White people got on we had to get up and stand up, but we just felt like that was part of the process. We really didn't raise a big fuss about it.

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*Daniel Saba:* But it didn't seem like there was a change though? You said you didn't really notice the change when it happened where you didn't have to sit at the back of the movie theater or stand up on the bus? Did you not notice that when it changed?

*Margaret Seawood:* I noticed it. When it got so that we could just sit anywhere we wanted to, I just sat where I wanted. That was it.

*Daniel Saba:* Just became part of the different process.

*Margaret Seawood:* Yes.

*Daniel Saba:* Did you ever, for example, register to vote? When did you first register to vote?

*Margaret Seawood:* When I got 21 because my father had always voted. I was just waitin' till I got 21. I was married by then, but I could hardly wait to vote. I think the first president I voted for was Nixon I believe. I believe it was.

*Daniel Saba:* So you didn't have any difficulties with voting then.

*Margaret Seawood:* No.

*Daniel Saba:* Were you a member of any political organizations of any sort?

*Margaret Seawood:* No.

*Daniel Saba:* We mentioned I guess I sort of glossed over the civil rights movement, but do you remember any other events during the civil rights era that you remember particularly?

*Margaret Seawood:* No. Like I said, we just didn't deal with that where I grew up. So I really just never had any problems.

*Daniel Saba:* But you remember it going on though.

*Margaret Seawood:* Of course.

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*Daniel Saba:* As a news event even.

*Margaret Seawood:* Of course.

*Daniel Saba:* What were your feelings about that at the time?

*Margaret Seawood:* Like I said, that's the way things were. It really didn't bother us. It didn't bother us that we had to go to the back of the bus 'cause we thought that was just the natural thing to do.

Then when it got so that we didn't have to go to the back of the bus, we didn't go to the back of the bus if we didn't want to, but you so used to goin' to the back so naturally when you got on the

bus you would head toward the back because that's what you had been used to doin'.

*Daniel Saba:* You have children, right?

*Margaret Seawood:* I have one daughter.

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*Daniel Saba:* Did you ever explain any of that --?

*Margaret Seawood:* I told her how things were; yes, but what I'm tryin' to say is we never had any hard feelins toward White people about how things were then. We just didn't. We really didn't because we weren't taught things like that. My father never really discussed it too much.

I think that's one reason when I did have to go to a White school where most of the students were White, I didn't have a problem.

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*Daniel Saba:* I guess we should wrap this up. I just wanted to ask you a couple questions. Who were your role models? This is really more for your childhood I guess.

*Margaret Seawood:* My teachers at school. They were my role models. I remember my sixth grade teacher, Miss Bernice Harris and I remember Miss Porter- ~~We had~~ was our-a penmanship teacher. We would go to her class to take writin' lessons.

In high school, Miss George B. Harvey. Most of the teachers – they were good teachers.

*Daniel Saba:* What would you consider your proudest moment of your life?

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*Margaret Seawood:* When I adopted my daughter. That was the best thing that ever happened to me. By then I was 36 years old. We got her in the hospital. She was three days old when we got her. That's the best thing to ever happen.

*Daniel Saba:* Well if there's anything you'd like to add.

*Margaret Seawood:* Oh, I was thinkin' about – there's a part of Memphis called Harper Harbor Town. HarperHarbor Town was not always HarperHarbor Town. That part of Memphis used to be – it was called Mud



[00:23:00] Island, but it was nothin' but wilderness, trees and vegetation and so forth, but it was a group of people who lived on Mud Island I called squatters.

My grandmother was raised on Mud Island. That was where White people and Black people lived together. They were desegregated long before it came to Memphis. She used to tell us about her bein' raised on Mud Island and the different families that lived there.

She was sayin' that she had got a proposal from one of the White guys that lived on the island, but she said she didn't wanna marry him. But anyhow their father, when they moved to Memphis they had four daughters.

[00:24:00] My great grandfather, they had four children, four daughters and he came to Memphis from Mud Island where they were squatters and he built each one of his daughters a house on North Main Street. A couple of the houses still there. A couple of 'em been torn down, but he built each one of his daughters a house on North Main Street.

*Daniel Saba:* You mentioned that in spite of how you were treated, having to stand up on the bus and that, that was just a part of the process and you didn't have any hard feelings towards Whites. Do you think that that was affected a little bit by the fact that your grandmother, for example, had these experiences with living in a desegregated community?

*Margaret Seawood:* Yeah; could have been because none of my family ever just talked about the White people doin' this and the White people doin' that. We never had that and we got along okay.  
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*Daniel Saba:* Well on behalf of Crossroads to Freedom thank you very much for participating in this interview.

*Margaret Seawood:* Okay; you're very welcome.

*Daniel Saba:* Thank you.

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