

Interview of Eddie Mae Hawkins. Interviewed by James Lanier, of The Crossroads to Freedom Project, Rhodes College.

Ms. Eddie Mae Hawkins was a cook for the Lorraine Motel in the years following the assassination of Dr. King. In this interview she discusses her first recollections of race relations, the transition in her move from a small town in Mississippi to Memphis, her involvement in the Sanitation workers strike and other marches, the actual assassination of Dr. King and her attempts to explain his death to her small son.

This interview was conducted in 2006 to be included in the Rhodes College Crossroads to Freedom Digital Archive Project.

The transcripts represent what was said in the interview to the best of our ability. It is possible that some words, particularly names, have been misspelled. We have made no attempt to correct mistakes in grammar.

James Lanier: ...raising some questions, and I want you to just tell us who you are, and where you're from. Where are you born and raised?

Eddie Mae Hawkins: My name is Eddie Mae Hawkins. I was born in Vaiden, Mississippi, Carroll County. And later, I moved to Winona Mississippi, Montgomery County. Eddie Mae Hawkins is a married name. Eddie Mae Tanner was my maiden name.

I went to JJ Knox High School in Winona, Mississippi, then later I came to Memphis, married for a while, and then later I entered Booker Washington Night School, I don't recall the year, but I must have been maybe early 20's. I had a job, but I was determined to finish high school, so I went to Booker Washington Night School. For four years to finish. I had finished the ninth grade except for two units at JJ Knox in Mississippi. So when I came to Memphis and sent back for the unit I had taken, they couldn't find them. JJ Knox got burned down during the integration period.

00:01:41

James Lanier: Really.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: So the units I had taken got burned in the old school building. And I had a lot – maybe two teachers who was teachin' at the time, but up in age and really couldn't remember.

James Lanier: Mmhmm.

00:02:00

Eddie Mae Hawkins: And memory wasn't a hope anyway cause they had to have it on paper. So when I went back to Booker Washington, the guidance counselor said I had to start in the ninth. So I went from the ninth through the twelfth in night school. It took a long time. Four units I already had, but I didn't have no proof I had it. So.

And the guidance counselor said at the time they asked the question did I work when I came to Memphis, and I said, "Yeah". And they said you could go to the Tennessee employment, and get the record. And they would have the grade units.

But at that time, when I came to Memphis, we went to the employment office for a job, and they would interview. And they would tell the person on the phone what color you were, how you dress, if you had on a dress that was ironed real well they would tell that. But they didn't take any praise for the blacks.

00:03:05

James Lanier: Mmhmm.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: So, I missed out. So I had to go back for ninth all the way through twelfth at Washington because I had no proof that I had had those units in the ninth grade.

James Lanier: Now, you came up here when you were about 17.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Right.

James Lanier: So that's around 1954.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Right.

James Lanier: I'm just trying to – so about mid '50s. And over the next ten years, maybe, you're working, going to school at night –

Eddie Mae Hawkins: And with a young son to take care of.

James Lanier: Right.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Who had some health problems. But we managed to get through.

James Lanier: Good. When did you, what were your first jobs?

Eddie Mae Hawkins: My first job, well the first job I had was in Wynona, Mississippi Trail Way Bus Station. I was – well I was hired for a dishwasher.

00:04:04

James Lanier: Mmhmm.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: But the cook didn't show up, so I did short order cooks. At the bus station.

James Lanier: Cooking –

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Trail Way Bus Station. Oh, I had belonged in cooking, because we lived in the farm. My grandmother was sick, she had cancer. So I was the oldest granddaughter at the house at the time, so I did the cooking. I didn't go to the field; I did the cooking, washing, ironing, cleaning, and seeing after her.

James Lanier: Yeah.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: So cooking wasn't such a hard job. And remember, I liked to do it anyway. So. And then later when I came to Memphis, I did private home work for a while. I worked for Christine Sherman, out at Graham and Hilldale. She had a mother who was 90 years old.

00:05:00

James Lanier: Hmm.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: And she wanted somebody to stay with her three days a week. So I worked for her, and took care of her. I guess I worked for her about five or six years. I worked for her while I was at Booker Washington at night school. Ms. Her name was Wilson. Christine Wilson, the old lady.

James Lanier: Christine, huh.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: And she would help me with my lessons.

James Lanier: Really?

Eddie Mae Hawkins: I had problems with my English, grammar; you can tell that now, I still have problems. But she would help me, and that's how I

managed to pass a lot of the tests that I was taking, because she helped me. I had to be there by eight, and I would stay there until five, and then I had to be at Washington at six thirty.

VIDEO CUT (.flv)

(5:57:15)

James Lanier: So this, it's the older woman you were taking care of who helped you?

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Eddie Mae Hawkins: Yes. With my lessons.

James Lanier: That's great. So she was supportive of your getting that degree.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Of course.

James Lanier: That's good.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: We were very good friends 'cause we flush all the medicine down the commode. If her daughter knew that she would kill us both.

(Laughter)

Eddie Mae Hawkins: But really, she didn't need – she was just old. Like she said, "I'm not sick, I'm old". And every morning, the dresser would have notes and bottles, pills, liquids and all this. They give her medicine, took the potassium out of her body, and then they'd give her medicine to put it back in. And one morning she said, "What's on the dresser for me?" I said, "The dresser's full" and she said, "Bring it, everything I'm supposed to take today in my room". And I said, "Okay", and I put it all on a tray. I said, "What am I supposed to do with it?" "You're supposed to flush it, and you better not tell it". And I didn't. She got better.

00:07:00

James Lanier: Oh she did? Good.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Every day, we'd get a cab and go down to Oak Court for grilled cheese and coke for lunch, and we'd go around the whole complex and look at all the flowers, and she would tell me the name of them, and how to take care of them.

James Lanier: Where was this you went?

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Graham and Hilldale; that's where she lived.

James Lanier: Yeah.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: And we went to Oak Court. The mall.

James Lanier: Okay.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: We'd get a cab.

James Lanier: So the mall.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: And then we would come back –

James Lanier: Out there on Poplar?

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Right.

James Lanier: Okay.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: We would look at the flowers and then we would go in the house. And then she would write letters the rest of the day. And I notice she getting a little nervous. And I don't even know why I thought of it. But I took some wine, poured it in a little glass. She had a little small pot and I heated it, and I gave it to her. And it would stop the shaking. I never told her daughter what we were doing.

00:08:04

(Laughter)

Eddie Mae Hawkins: We had a good time.

James Lanier: Did she pass away, or why did you quit working there?

Eddie Mae Hawkins: I quit working there because Saint Patrick's wanted somebody part time. And see, in order to get out at Graham and Hillsdale, I had to be at the bus stop at four o'clock in the morning. And I was living in LeMoyne Garden, you know where LeMoyne-Owen College is.

James Lanier: Mmhmm.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: And I had to walk down from one place, up to Walker Street to catch a bus, and it was really dark. And St. Patrick's housekeeper had retired, and my son was going to school there. And the Priest announced that night they were looking for somebody to work for them three days a week. And my son volunteered me. And the Priest called me, he said, "I hear you're a very good cook". I said, "I'll do" and he said, "Come over and talk with me. And I went over and talked with him. And I only had to be there at nine, which made a whole lot of difference.

Commented [RC1]: This is St. Patrick's Boys School

00:09:18

James Lanier: It's a lot closer to your neighborhood too.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: And Ms. Wilson, when I told her I was quitting to go to school full time, she knew it. She said, "You're not quitting me for those preachers, are you?" Of course I told her, "No ma'am". But it paid more, and it was closer. And I could go when, I went; Tuesday, Thursdays and Saturdays, and that was much better for me. So that's why."

James Lanier: So you think we can put a year on when you started at Saint Patrick's, is that –

00:10:00

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Hmm.

James Lanier: 1960 by then, or later?

Eddie Mae Hawkins: It had to be later, late '60s. King died '68?

James Lanier: Mmhmm.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: I think maybe '72 or 3 at Saint Patrick's.

James Lanier: Okay, so you didn't start there until '72 or 3.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: It was in the '70s; might have been later than that.

James Lanier: Well, let's go back to the neighborhood, to LeMoyné Garden. You lived there when you came to Memphis, and –

Eddie Mae Hawkins: No, no. When I first came to Memphis, I lived on Fourth Street; 292 South Fourth. It's across from Saint Patrick's School [and Church] now.

James Lanier: Mmhmm.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Since they rebuilt. That's where I was living when all of this stuff came about with King. I moved to LeMoyne Gardens after the assassination of Dr. King.

00:11:08

James Lanier: Okay.

VIDEO CUT (.flv)
(11:11:10)

Eddie Mae Hawkins: See, I left LeMoyne Gardens and purchased this house, and I've been here, this November will be 44 years. I lived in LeMoyne Gardens eight, and I left LeMoyne Gardens and came here. But I only moved to LeMoyne Gardens after Dr. King [was assassinated]. See, I was in the downtown area with all of –

James Lanier: South Fourth Street when all of that was happening. Well what was that neighborhood like, where you were living?

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Oh, before the, during the assassination?

James Lanier: Yeah.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Ooooh, it was – Fourth Street to Gayoso was like 4,000 families.

00:12:01

James Lanier: Mmhmm.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: The neighborhood was full of houses, apartments, some of 'em shotgun houses, some of them were apartments. It was a lot of people.

James Lanier: Yeah.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: In the downtown area at that time, and then after, oh, well, the urban renewal didn't come through until about a couple of years

later; this was after Dr. King's assassination; before that time, it was an awful lot of people in the neighborhood.

James Lanier: Where did you all shop?

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Downtown. Main Street. Cause all we had to do was just kind of walk down the hill; everything was in that area. Like down on Union, car dealers.

00:13:01

James Lanier: Mmhmm. What about Beale Street, what was it like?

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Oh, it was wide open. We had all of the stores, greeners, all of the things; all of the stores and things were down Beale Street. And then you could always – you lived in the neighborhood – walk. Down Beale Street, up to Main Street, and back. It was just an awful lot of people in the area at the time.

And after the assassination, that all just, look like, kind of disappeared. Now some went to Leath School, which was right there on Linden, and Danny Thomas. First grade.

James Lanier: So there in the, the '60s here, you're living there, and you're still taking that early morning bus out to work for Ms. Wilson

00:14:06

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Yes.

James Lanier: Yeah.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Yes.

James Lanier: Living down there –

Eddie Mae Hawkins: She was the cause of me getting an apartment in LeMoyné Gardens, because she – I had put in for them, but every time I called they said they didn't have vacancy. And she was asking me, cause I was paying like, it was a two room, bathroom and a kitchen. And it was like \$52 a month, plus utilities. She said, "Why don't you try to get an apartment?" I said, "I tried, but they don't have any vacant". And she said, "Pass me the telephone". I give her the telephone and she called some lady and told her I worked for her, and told her I was paying too much rent where I

was living, and what they was paying – at that time, they were just paying \$10 and car fare.

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And two days later, I got a letter, and it had apartments in just about everywhere. And I chose the LeMoyne Gardens cause it was right over the bus line. And that's how I got an apartment, cause she got me in there.

James Lanier: Now are we talking about \$10 a day?

Eddie Mae Hawkins: And car fare.

James Lanier: And car fare.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: That's what she would get.

James Lanier: Three days a week.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Well, if you had five – well, see, if you worked five days at – that kinda cut it down a bit. But if you were doin' day work, that's what you would get. \$10 a day and car fare. Car fare, which would mean bus fare, probably 50. And if you had to go across the zone, you paid a nickel for a transfer. It was kinda crazy, that's the way it was at the time.

James Lanier: Would you describe the Wilsons as very wealthy, or –

00:16:00

Eddie Mae Hawkins: No. The daughter worked at the hospital out on Getwell, it's called Bethel now, I think, but at that time it was the rich who had got hooked on drugs, alcohol and things of that sort, she was secretary there. And the mother just got, like, her Social Security check. So it was Christine, she was in a two-bedroom apartment. And once upon a time, she was married to Dr. Sherman. I think he was a dentist, but he was long-deceased. And then after her mother got up in age, she moved the mother in with her. I don't think they were very wealthy people, but her daughter made a pretty decent living.

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VIDEO CUT (.flv)

(17:04:27)

James Lanier: Let's go back in time a little bit then, and then we'll start forward. What are your clearest memories of segregation? When as a child, where along the way did you start understanding what was going on and –

Eddie Mae Hawkins: I think when I came to Memphis. I never thought anything about it, and I don't think I even knew anything about it. White folks didn't like us, and we didn't like white folks. And I thought, I didn't understand that. I don't even know when it started.

00:17:50

See, when we lived on the farm, my grandmother for within 500 miles, she was the only midwife. She delivered the babies. And whoever lived within that 500 miles, white or black, she delivered the babies, including some of her grandchildren. I think I was one of her babies she delivered.

James Lanier: Hmm.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: And I just couldn't understand why they didn't like us, and we didn't like them, cause, like, if she would go and deliver babies, well if the mother had a little toddlers, she brought them to our house. And we woke up in the mornings and these two little white babies at the foot of the bed, and maybe three of us at the head, and we had to take care of 'em, and we took care of 'em until the mama got able to take care of the babies. And the midwives didn't want you to do anything till your baby was six weeks old, you know.

James Lanier: Mmhmm.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: My grandmother would stay as long as she could; and if somebody else had a baby, she would have to go, but Ms. Seawood would go and stay with this woman; cook, clean up, see after the children and maybe cook for the husband.

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The next two or three days, Ms. Dabner or somebody would do it, until the baby got six weeks old. And then they would kinda take the children back to the mama, and they would be alright for a while. So I didn't know we didn't like 'em. And I was trying to find out why we didn't.

And then when this, all of this talk about Emmett Till; and that, I, mmmm. My feelings began to be a little bit different. But I had often heard about the hangin' and all of this kind of stuff, but where I grew up, we didn't have that.

James Lanier: Hmm.

00:20:00

Eddie Mae Hawkins: I guess we were dumb, I don't know. But I don't remember anybody in our home town. I remember there was a lady named Ms. Van Evitt that always talked about her son who was missing, and they never knew what happened to him, or where he went. And I think Ms. Van Evitt lived to be 100 years old, and she never saw that child again, nobody ever knew what happen to him.

And then there was the Galloways, who raised a white baby. Apparently she woke up, and this baby was in a box on her front porch, and the baby was crying. And there was a note in there that said, "Take care," or something. And there was money. Now the Galloways always had aplenty, and a lot of old folks say that well, that really was her grandbaby and the white folks didn't want him. One of her sons, I guess, had got a baby by one of them. I don't know, I was little.

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You know, when older people talked in those days, you had to go outside. And I was a little bit nosey; I'd go and stand around the corner and hear what I could hear.

So when we began to hear about Emmett Till and how, to me, I must have been real small, cause I always thought he was cut up; you know, I don't know. Now, I had an uncle that lived in Drew, Mississippi, and that stuff was close around him. Then, that's when I discovered it was really not as nice as I thought it was. Which kind of makes you kind of sad.

James Lanier: Yeah.

00:22:00

Eddie Mae Hawkins: So –

VIDEO CUT (.flv)

(22:02:13)

James Lanier: So by the time you were a teenager, 14, 15, you were aware of this threatening thing out there.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Yeah. But our grandfather really didn't allow us to do, we couldn't say anything about anybody.

James Lanier: Mmhmm.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: We really couldn't think bad of anybody, you know.

James Lanier: Right.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: So I guess that was good, but I'll tell you one thing, it was kind of sad as you got older and found out things wasn't what you thought they were.

James Lanier: You started to say something about coming to Memphis, how you began to see stuff when you came – is that –

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Eddie Mae Hawkins: Well, Memphis – that's where it all really came out, that the white folks really didn't like us. And we weren't supposed to like them, you know. "If I hate you, then you need to hate me". I didn't quite see it like that, but I began to understand how this not liking us worked. Which wasn't so good either. But, I guess I went along with it. Somehow or another I thought it would probably have been better if we had stayed in the country or stayed on the back side of what they call "no man's land", didn't wanna learn about – but I guess eventually it'd go all over.

And "you can't go in there cause only white folks go in there" and all of that kind of stuff. See, we hadn't experienced all of that. Maybe there wasn't any places to go, but –

00:24:01

James Lanier: So in the city, you became more aware of places you weren't supposed to go.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Oh yes. "Don't go in there. Don't nobody go there but white folks". "Okay." And if you go in there you have to go down to the

– well I was used to color goin' here and color goin' there, cause even that was in the city. Like, I worked at Trail Way Bus Station, the first job I had. And on one side, all of the white people would get in. And they had this little back room in the kitchen where people who were riding the bus, colored, could come in and get a sandwich. And there wasn't but three seats for you to sit down. We'd give away a lot of stuff out of the back door though. Oooh, I'm not saying that was the nicest thing to do, but we could really get mad. But later Ms. Pauline Crowder was a cook, and Ms. Estella.

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See that was a transfer point for the Mississippi Delta. And ten and twelve busses coming in, and people, and he would get awful nervous he would cuss her and brush her, and she would fix hamburgers and sacks of chicken. We wouldn't let the people sit in the kitchen and eat, "Get on the bus, get on the bus". But she did that because whenever he was cruel to her, the only way she could get back was to give the food away. I mean, one time she had me cook a hamburger, I fixed ten hamburgers, put 'em in a sack for a lady and three children. (*Laughter*).

I guess that was her way of – of course at that time, you couldn't say anything.

James Lanier: Well, yeah.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: You couldn't say anything, and that was a way of getting back. That was a way of saying something. Which was the wrong way to do it, but at that time, you just, whatever they said to you, you had to –

00:26:09

James Lanier: Mentioning the bus station makes me think about busses and riding in the back. Did you experience that?

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Oh yes. You could flag the bus on the highway, and you put your money, pay your money, but you knew to go all the way back to the back. And if there wasn't no seats there, you stood up.

James Lanier: Was it that way riding the city bus in Memphis if you were going out east to work?

Eddie Mae Hawkins: When I first came to Memphis, it was like that but all of that changed during the integration.

James Lanier: Yeah.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Not during the integration, during the— what is this, Montgomery, where they had that bus there —

James Lanier: Montgomery.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Montgomery. Well see, like overnight in Memphis you got on the bus, you could sit down anywhere.

James Lanier: Hmm. And that'd be in the '50s, after —

00:27:00

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Mmhhh. That uh - when they had all of that, all of a sudden you could, ride the bus, sit anywhere, and all of a sudden, the black drivers begin to get hired. All of a sudden you go to the bank, you see black tellers. At first, they were asking why we didn't have any blacks working in the bank, they said there wasn't nobody — they wasn't educated, they weren't qualified. And I remember somebody saying, if they weren't educated, how'd they get educated overnight?

But see, that movement with the bus company and everything began to kinda change a little bit.

James Lanier: Mmhhh. Was there any early experience in your getting involved in those changes, or your people at church or in your family talk about the movement?

00:28:04

Eddie Mae Hawkins: No. If they did, I didn't pay attention. Well see, I was young then. I had a lot of things to do. Besides workin', goin' to school, doin' a little partying on the side, and flirting with the young mens, that was part of it too. *(Laughter)*

James Lanier: Have to have a life.

(Laughter)

Eddie Mae Hawkins: I thought I had made one. Well, it was enjoyable. I enjoyed myself, I didn't get myself hurt, nobody else.

VIDEO CUT (.flv)

(28:35:21)

James Lanier: Well, by '68 though, were you downtown in one of the marches, and how did that come about?

Eddie Mae Hawkins: I was downtown. I was livin' downtown long before the marches. It started, you know, with the sanitation strike. And we began to get these little mountains in garbage. And then somebody said that Dr. King was coming in support of the sanitation workers and all. The churches' pastors began to get involved; like, we'd go to church on Sunday morning, and there would – they would tell you where meetings and things would be.

00:29:14

There was a group to talk to, I think, who was mayor then? Loeb. Lowell. But I don't think – I didn't, I don't know about this, I never thought it would come to somebody getting' killed just over a little garbage, I never thought it would come to that. But more and more and then the march was scheduled. What was it, the first march, I think we had, did we have a freeze?

James Lanier: Mmhmm.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: It was the night freeze and they were cancelled. And then the second one we started, and the riots started.

00:30:08

James Lanier: And you were walking with the march –

Eddie Mae Hawkins: I was walkin' – we were walkin' six deep and everybody was singing. We had just turned at 3rd and Beale. Just turned. And everybody was singing, pretty day like today.

And all of a sudden, people screaming and glass flying through the air looked like diamonds. I never experienced nothin' like that. And it was like I was in a whirlwind, you know; people were so confused, and then you would see people runnin' with boats of

material, stealing out of the pawn shops that had been there for years, you know.

00:31:00

And the crowd seems to get so confused. And we were singin'. And all of a sudden, there was screamin, and cussin', and everybody wanted to kill somebody. Like, even older people was in the march. I never – I said, "How can we be singin, and happy, and then we wanna kill?"

So it took me a while to get out of the crowd, it's like I was just turned around, and I didn't know which direction to go. It didn't take me a good ten minutes to get to my house, cause I was on 4th, right up on Linden. But the people was, it was so many, the tail end of the march had not left Clayborn Temple. Those people were still sittin' in the church there. They were still lining them up.

00:32:00

And I got – the crowd kinda got thin, and I walked back, and just as I went to step up, the helicopter sprayed tear gas. Now that's an awful feelin'. It's like I couldn't breathe –

James Lanier: At your house?

Eddie Mae Hawkins: And my eye were runnin water, and there were people just literally, they runnin' in my house. And it was an old man standin' on the streets, and he said, "Don't go in the house, stay out. The wind will blow in". He said, "I had an experience with tear gas", I believe he said World War 2, maybe he said World War 1; he was an old man. He said, "If you stay out, then the air get out – your eyes will clear up".

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In the meantime, Clayborn Temple, later there were a lot of windows broke out of Clayborn Temple. But the Police department broke those windows out. Cause people were in there, and the helicopter was sprayin the tear gas from the air, and the police knocked the windows out and sprayed tear gas in there where there was people. And what they did knock out, I think, by spraying the gas, and some of the people that was inhaling all that gas inside probably knocked some of the windows out too. And I guess maybe if it hadn't have been for the helicopter's spraying tear gas, Memphis might have been in worse shape. It was in bad shape. And I don't know, we all were kinda confused from that.

00:34:00

And then later, 4:30, it was a lady came through with a walkie-talkie, her first name was Gladys, that's all I remember. But they told us to get our children and stay inside, that the mayor had put a curfew in the city. We didn't even know about it. If she hadn't a came through with that, we wouldn't have been warned.

James Lanier: Hmm.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: And by that time, all they had to do was sit in the house and watch television, which they showed – I think Dr. King, the head of the march, was at Main and Gayosa, but they had crossed Gayosa. You know Goldsmith's was on the corner. And they had crossed Gayosa. And apparently they had got Dr. King in and taken him back to the hotel or something. But the whole city was just confusion. Sirens, people still runnin', it was scary. I had never seen nothing like that.

00:35:05

And then later, about 6:00, the National Guard was on every corner.

James Lanier: Hmm.

VIDEO CUT (.flv)
(35:11:25)

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Fourth, and Ponitoc. It was a duplex on the hill – I lived in one side, Ms. Van Hunt lived in the other side. Down the street was 4th and Linden, down the other end of the street was 4th and Vance. That was at least 20 or 30 National Guards with rifles, rifle covered with the little white top or whatever. And they were there maybe two or three days, I don't know. But see, all of those places like **Burgowan Sundry**; the beer, the cigarettes, and all that stuff was taken out, that was taken out by the National Guard.

James Lanier: Hmm.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Cause like, my porch, they'd sit on the porch at night and drank beer and smoked cigarettes. And you had to get up the next morning and clean the porch off. But they were there; suppose I don't know what they were there for.

00:36:06

I think we were in too much of shock. But a lot of those stoves and things was like down on the corner, Vance and **Burgowan Sundry**, and QS Liquor Store. Now I do, I remember seeing people breakin' those windows out, but not taking anything. The National Guard was takin' the stuff.

James Lanier: Hmm.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: That went on, well, the city kinda had calmed down by seven, eight o'clock that night. And of course, the National Guard was here to "keep peace", if you wanna call it that. Now I don't think they bothered anybody. But the stuff that was left in the stores in the neighborhood where I lived, they were, they're the ones that got it. The liquor, and whatever – they only had stuff like ice cream, cookies and stuff. The kind of stuff neighborhood kids would buy, you know.

00:37:15

It was after then, what happened. Well we kinda settled down, and then the next thing happened what was it, the 18 inches of snow, which was good. The children called it the "Charlie Brown Snow". It reminded them of the snow you see in the Charlie Brown movie. But it was nice to have the snow, because it did cover the mountains of garbage looked like – Memphis looked like a little town with a lot of mountains, which was garbage. But that was a strange snow, cause there really wasn't any cold. But it stuck. Got 18 inches. It was so pretty. And I think Dr. King went back to Atlanta and came back.

00:38:10

And three things happened. The riot, the snow, maybe something else happened before he was killed. I can't think what it was.

James Lanier: Well, he came back and gave that great speech before he was killed.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Yeah, at Mason Temple. Before the assassination.

James Lanier: Right. You didn't go down there you didn't hear it?

Eddie Mae Hawkins: No, I didn't go to that. Maybe it was, you know what, late one evening it came, it was like it rained a little ice. I'm tryin' to think if this was before the snow or after. Cause the march was scheduled. And because of that weather, it was cancelled.

00:39:12

James Lanier: Right.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: And then it rescheduled. And we were supposed to have been ready for the march, and then they had the speech at Mason Temple.

James Lanier: Had real bad lightening and thunder and rain that night.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Well, if it was thunder and lightening at night, I was asleep, cause I sleep good if its thunder and lightening. And, but anyway, we was getting ready for the march. And that evening I was watching the television, "We interrupt this program to bring Dr. Martin Luther King has been shot at the Lorraine Hotel. And everything just like, bam.

00:40:05

Why. And then, at that time we did not need the National Guard. It was so quiet. Ooh, it was a strange thing. Even the children – in that neighborhood, there was a lady that lived around on Linden in that circle, and everybody said she was crazy. And she came out, and she was loud. She said, "Everybody say I'm crazy", she said, "but when something happen and little children don't play", she said, "Something's sadly wrong". Which, she was right. The children, they were just standin, you know, like they were lost. And it was so quiet.

00:41:03

VIDEO CUT (.flv)
(41:05:25)

I think the cars even levered off or something; I don't know, it was somethin' strange about it. We didn't need the National Guard. Wasn't nobody raisin' a stink. And that curfew was put back on. And, was it the next day, we got a little announcement maybe three or four o'clock that, I don't remember what time, and before the five o'clock news, everybody is comin' on; Vice President

Hoffman, all the other dignitaries and I said, "He's got to be dead, from all doing that. Then, Ben Hooks, he came on. And he was literally crying. And then shortly after then, its' like looked like they insist that Mayor Loeb say something, but you didn't see his face you just heard a voice, like a tape recorder.

00:42:15

And maybe late, eight or nine o'clock, is when they said they regret that Dr. King had passed. But I think by the time all of these dignitaries had come on, I think I already knew that he was dead, but I guess they was kinda giving us time to get it together. And the next day, what was his name, Edgar Robinson came back and told me they were viewing Dr. King's body right around the corner from where I lived, Fourth and Vance at R.H. Little & Sons Funeral Home.

00:43:00

And my son said, "Mamma can I go see him?" And he said, "I never met him". I said, "Okay". So we walked down Fourth Street, round the corner to Vance and as far as you could see were people. And the only thing you could hear was *[sniffling noise]* like people crying, and the police car. The radio in the police car. It was so quiet and cameras flashed. That's all.

And you would walk into the funeral home, go to the left, his body was in the big chapel across. And it was here, and you could walk. And people walked up, view the body, and sit for just about two seconds, and then would leave. This side, it looked like his shirt collar that was a little bit too tight. It was a little fold here, but his skin was so pretty. He looked so peaceful.

00:44:18

Charles, Charles was the mortician; can't think of his last name, we only called him by his first name. He was in forensic in World War II, and he said he worked with a white man who taught him how to deal with people who had shot, burns, and all this kind of stuff. He specialized – he used to work at the VA every once in a while. And he said when he got ready to do Dr. King, well you know the city was on curfew, and they had him in a police car. And at every checkpoint, they would tell them to let him through. I think he and Lewis went to Atlanta when they had King's body back, because I think they had to redress him again.

00:45:16

But anyway, he died the next year. It did something to him, it did. And he died, but – now somebody said that half of his – Charles told me, he used to come to my house a lot, I lived on Fourth Street – he said half of his face was literally blown off. But when you, well, he, I guess he had been in that business for quite a while, cause I saw a young lady living, got burned up in a car. And he asked her mother to give him a picture of how she really looked. And you could not tell that she had been burned. So he specialized in, but whatever secret he had, he went to the grave with it cause he – I think he passed the next year after Dr. King.

00:46:22

And then after that, it was tryin' to get the sanitation worker, and this little fast-talkin' man, Jesse Epps; I don't know of what happened to him. But after the sanitation worker seemed to get a sort of decent pay. He kinda disappeared like. I don't know what happened to him. You remember him though?

James Lanier: Yeah. Oh yeah.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: I don't know what happened to him.

VIDEO CUT (.flv)
(46:52:18)

James Lanier: I was gonna ask again, about that march where the rioting started, was that the first time you had been with the garbage worker supporters, or did somebody ask you to, did you have a friend who went with you, or you just wanted –

00:47:08

Eddie Mae Hawkins: No, I just wanted to, I just wanted to go. Well of course, when you handle that much garbage at a dollar and a quarter an hour, that's kinda sad, you know. But that was the first time I had ever been in, really involved. You know like at the church, the members we had who were members of our church, they would, the pastor would ask us to give an extra offering so we could kinda give them something to kinda help them out until they got settled. But I just never though it would come to that kind of stuff, you know? That somebody would get killed.

Now the memorial march, I didn't participate in, but I left my doors open. They asked nobody to march with umbrellas, and I had a house full of – bed was full of umbrellas, my couch was full of umbrellas– I had umbrellas standing in the corners, and they were – I said "I'ma keep the umbrella".

00:48:20

But that first march, that riot, I said, "Lord, if you let me get out of this one, I won't get into another one. I'll do something to help, but I won't – " I never felt like that. I can't see a bunch of, all these people that, ooh, singing, it was soundin' so good; then like that [*Snapping sound*] we were gonna fight, we were gonna kill, we wanna shoot; it's called instant violence I guess, I don't know; I've never seen nothing like it.

Now the memorial march, quite a few people. It was so many people. I didn't participate in it, and like I said, I kept umbrellas for whoever wanted to march.

00:49:11

James Lanier: Did things seem to get back to normal in the next few months, or a sense of what your neighborhood felt like after –

Eddie Mae Hawkins: No, it didn't. I don't think it got back to normal. Cause by the next year, I think Urban Renewal, all of the houses and things to kinda getting to, and buildings beginning to be torn down. That neighborhood was never the same. And the Saint Patrick's Church, Clayborn Temple, Beale Street Baptist, they were all still there. But a lot of the individual houses – they were shacks anyway. They really needed to be tore down anyway. And Urban Renewal came through. They never did anything else until, what, four years ago when the FedEx start forming.

00:50:17

James Lanier: Yeah.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: But I thought, you know, I thought Urban Renewal, I thought what they were doin, they were tearing our old houses down, they were gonna build us some new ones. But that wasn't quite what the city had in mind. But, of course, you know, they closed Clayborn Temple, because it in bad need of repair; Beale Street Baptist, Saint Patrick's, the Catholic church, it's the only one did any

extensive remodeling; the whole school came down, and they built a new school. But now, across the street, the Flakes Apartment has been torn down. Just a whole different neighborhood now.

00:51:03

James Lanier: Did you say your son went to that older Catholic school, or did I remember right? Or was he school-age by that time?

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Yes he was school-age, he didn't go to that school, he want to Leaf School, which was at Linden. Leaf School was in one part of Linden, and then another part was on Ponitop.

James Lanier: Did he keep going there, or –

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Now he went to the Catholic school in the summertime, cause see, what they had, what's it called – catch-up program. All of the children, mostly the children who failed, and then they had the Simon Youth Program. Now he was into that, but he – now he went to Catholic school, but later he went to Memphis Catholic High. Cause see, at that time, Saint Patrick's did not have a full-time school, they just had school that they ran in the summer.

James Lanier: Was he ever involved in bussing?

00:52:01

Eddie Mae Hawkins: No, no.

James Lanier: So you didn't have an experience with that.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: No, no. See, things had changed then. See, with the assassination of Dr. King, a whole lot of things just changed, look like, overnight. But I think maybe the way was kinda already paved when my son came along, which was, what, in the '70s, I guess. Things was a little bit better, you could ride the bus, you could go in same restaurants and eat.

VIDEO CUT (.flv)

(52:51:19)

James Lanier: And you started working at Saint Patrick's then about that time, early '70s.

00:52:56

Eddie Mae Hawkins: My papers would probably say '71, '72, but really, maybe '73, according to the Diocese. But see, the priests used to have me to just come over maybe if they were havin' company and fix lunch, or fix a dinner for someone. But the Dieses, I think, say '73, when I start.

James Lanier: And was Saint Patrick's integrated?

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Saint Patrick's, supposedly the reason Saint Patrick's, they wasn't condemned with some of the other churches in the neighborhood, because Saint Patrick's, Clayborn Temple and Beale Street were so historical. If you were a black Catholic, and came to Memphis, Saint Patrick, was the only church that you could worship, and not be discriminated.

00:53:55

And at Beale Street, both white and black worshipped together. Of course they still got the seats – that little section where they used to seat the blacks, and _____ at Clayborn Temple too; Clayborn Temple, my understanding, down in that basement somewhere it used to be part of the Underground Railroad that run over to the Fielding House. And you know where the Fielding House –

James Lanier: Yeah. But now, Beale Street Baptist was a black church historically, wasn't it; from the beginning?

Eddie Mae Hawkins: No, I don't think it was. I think it was white; that's the reason that section was set off there for the black people. Later on, it probably got to be – now I don't know too much about the history of Beale Street, but Reverend Jordan when I worked at Saint Patrick's, he was pastor then and he and the _____, the man I worked for, were very good friends. And he used to talk about it

James Lanier: So most – when you started working at Saint Patrick's, most people who came to church there were black?

00:55:01

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Half and half.

James Lanier: Half and half.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: They were black and white.

James Lanier: Well they fully integrated the –

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Yes, yes –

James Lanier: - church.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Now, a lady came from California who went, and she was in her '90s. She went to school when she was five and six years old, at Saint Patrick's School. A black lady. And she was the one telling us that both black and white went to Saint Patrick's and there wasn't a problem with it. But I did know that they could worship together and not be discriminated. So, that's about –

James Lanier: Do you have anything in wrapping up, any feeling about the most important changes in your life, the way things changed by the '70s and '80s, any major difference for you that came out all this?

00:56:04

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Hmm, I hadn't thought about that.

James Lanier: That's not a very good question, really.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Well, I think all of 'it was good, just depends on how you look at it. Well, I know one thing – the job situation was better. Cause I got a chance to – and now I can enjoy the Social Security check and the retirement check.

(Laughter)

Eddie Mae Hawkins: But then you get cheated that too!

James Lanier: Huh.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: What's this new deal that the supposed president came out with?

James Lanier: Yeah, Medicare, and, yeah, the drug.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: And your medicine. But see, it doesn't help me. Because the lady told me I needed downstairs, I get two checks, some people only get one. You know, she kinda made me feel like I took it. And I was kinda wantin' to say a few things to her, but I said, "Well, I didn't steal it, I worked for it."

00:57:06

But see, that medicine deal, I haven't **erman**. Because of the hot weather, I just have very sensitive skin. I have to pay \$60.00 for it. You tell me Medicare put it in a block all by itself, all that kind of stuff. And whatever I'm getting', I have to pay at least \$35.00 for. Plus, I have to pay the insurance company insurance.

So, some things is alright, and some things is not. In other words, you need one foot in the grave, and the other on a banana peel so you'll soon slide in, then it'll be over.

(Laughter)

00:58:04

Eddie Mae Hawkins: You know, even at the expense of things now, it is better. Now, you can just about go anywhere you want and enjoy yourself, or do anything you want within reason, sure you have to have sense enough to know what to do. And I know years ago, if you had a car looked pretty good, they'd just assume you stole it. And if you had money, you was not free to spend it. I have a dinner ring that was my mama's. My stepfather, years later, put seven diamonds in it.

When I was a little girl, she brought this ring to my grandmother for my grandmother to keep for her. She was in a ten cent store buying some lace; she was makin' somebody a dress, and two white ladies saw this ring. And she said, "Look at that ring that colored girl got on, she must have stole it". I think when my daddy was courting her, he worked six weeks to buy that ring.

VIDEO CUT (.flv)

(58:57:02)

00:58:57

I got it now since she passed, it's a little silver ring, it's made pretty. It's antique now. And she couldn't wear it. My grandmother kept it. I remember when my grandmother got real sick, she had it tied up in a little pocket, she gave it to her. And she said, "Maybe one day you could wear this". And I couldn't understand that.

A lot of people, our people could take vacations, but they couldn't go cause they was scared to show up with this money stuff. And you didn't go places, especially with your family back then, because there was nowhere you could use the bathroom after they closed the side for the colored. So you just stayed home.

James Lanier: Yeah.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: So it's things, in a way, is much better.

James Lanier: Alright. One little thing to go back to, did you know anything about the Lorraine Hotel before it _____ -

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Yes. I worked there.

James Lanier: You worked there?

00:59:59

Eddie Mae Hawkins: After Dr. King was assassinated, Walter Bailey, this was before they switched over to the museum, he wanted, you know, different people were comin' in after Dr. King got killed and they wanted to look around, and they wanted to see what Dr. King – and he wanted somebody to cook. And I cooked for Bailey about six months.

James Lanier: Hmm. Okay. So the year after –

Eddie Mae Hawkins: No, it wasn't a year after.

James Lanier: Sometime after –

Eddie Mae Hawkins: It would have to be a couple of years after. And he would just want all these different people would be coming in, and he wanted to serve a pretty decent lunch. Of course, money wasn't goin' too well then, cause after the assassination of King, the hotel business sort of went down too. So I would go over and cook for him whenever he was having all these dignitaries and things.

01:01:03

I didn't know his wife, cause see she died shortly after Dr. King got killed. She was dead before the next week. Lorraine.

James Lanier: Hmm.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Yes.

James Lanier: I did not know that.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: She was buried during the time that they had a curfew on the city. Apparently when King got shot, they said she went into shock. She never came out. But I do know that second curfew after King was killed, she was buried that week. Lorraine. She –

James Lanier: Lorraine Bailey.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: She died.

James Lanier: Well we sure appreciate your taking time for us. You've got some great memories.

01:01:58

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Yep. Once you start goin with it. You know, the only thing about this will be, you just can't put your feelings. I think nobody really – I don't like to talk about it too much, else I get a little teary. But I experienced, like my grandmother passed, she was the first and I thought I could not live without her. And my grandfather. And, when my mamma passed, it was kinda sad too. But it doesn't compare to when King got – I don't know what kind of – how you describe the feeling. I really don't. It's just, and it all was unnecessary. I think.

01:02:54

You know, we know when you come into this world you certainly gonna leave here, but to be killed over some garbage, it just didn't make sense. It's so unnecessary. But I guess that's part of life, we gonna always run into things that's not even necessary. Now that's when you breathe a fine line about hate. I don't think you really understand it until something really happens, how hateful we can be. And that don't make no sense. Doesn't make sense. So, that, well, I'll be dead and gone when the next Civil Rights Movement.

James Lanier: Yeah, let them worry about the next.

01:03:56

Eddie Mae Hawkins: He's probably, or she's probably already living, but hasn't really got started. I'll be going to sleep then, and I won't have to talk

about it. I won't even have to remember. It's hard for you to forget it, though.

James Lanier: Yeah.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: It's hard to forget. Cause when you're not even thinking about it, something comes up and it flashes at you. You know, my son asked me, "Mamma, why did they kill him? What did he do?" And you know, you can't answer those questions, he was a little bitty boy. When we were coming back from the funeral. And he said, "Mamma, what did he do?" I said, "Maybe nothing. Tried to make a few things right." But he didn't understand that.

James Lanier: Yeah, yep.

Eddie Mae Hawkins: Well, I hope you got something that can –

01:05:01

James Lanier: You've come as close as anybody, trying to explain that pain, that feeling that, it's hard to –

01:05:14

[End of Audio]