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Makia Crump: On behalf of Crossroads to Freedom, Rhodes College and Knowledge Quest – I want to thank you for taking the time to share your story with us today. I am a **Makia Crump**.

Cameron Jones: And I am Cameron Jones.

Makia Crump: And we are honored to meet you and learn from your inspirational story. Today's interview will be archived online at the Crossroads to Freedom web site. Can you state some basic biographical information for the record? What is your name?

Hattie Tucker: My name is Mrs. Hattie J. Tucker.

Makia Crump: If you don't mind me asking, what year were you born?

Hattie Tucker: 1923.

Makia Crump: Where were you raised?

Hattie Tucker: I was raised in Canton, Mississippi in the rural area just seven miles south of Canton, Mississippi.

Makia Crump: What is your occupation?

Hattie Tucker: My occupation at the time – Well I was born on the farm –

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and I lived there until I was 26. Then I went to that – Till – Yeah I was 26. And I went to the high school in Canton, Mississippi. And the segregation was still – You all have heard of segregation I guess. We're so far removed so some people don't hardly know about it. But your grandparents knew about it 'cause it was – So when I graduated from the high school it was during WW II. And my brother started in that school with me in Canton, Mississippi but he got called into the service.

And I stayed. I was able to stay there and finish. So four of us girls went into the school in Jackson. That's where the nursing school was. The hospital was on North State Street in Jackson, Mississippi. And that's where they had a dormitory right outside of the hospital –

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at the back. And we all went there and lived in the dormitory the three years. Four of us girls left that class as we graduated. We decided we'd go into that nursing school __ therapy.

The hospital was on North State Street in Jackson as I said and we all went there. And we lived in the dormitory the three years. We all graduated. And as we graduated the director had left the school in 1948. And she had come to John Gaston Hospital. And she knew we were graduating in 1949. So she wrote us a letter and told us as many as wanted could come here 'cause they was needing more nurses. So four of us called the City of New Orleans. Girls didn't buy cars in that time. So we've got the City of New Orleans in Canton. It used to come through here every day at 11:00 AM.

You all have probably heard of it. They finally took that train off.

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So we rode here and we decided before we left home that we would live at the Y. The YWCA was down Vance. So I stayed there four years. My other classmates went on to Cleveland. And two of them still live in Cleveland. One of them was my roommate all the way through school. But she decided to go to Cleveland with the other two. They went to Cleveland and she still resides there.

I stayed here and I was glad I stayed here because I could always go home easy. I could catch the train and go back home to Canton and see my relatives in Canton and Jackson. So anyway that was 1949 we came here and got the job. So I stayed on that job 34 years really at the City Hospital. It was called John Gaston. In 1934 –

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they were looking for this new name and they decided – Someone brought in the name MED and they named it The MED. So that's what you all know it as – The MED. You can see it over there.

I stayed there and Mr. ____ was coming in 1984. That's why I left. I was going to stay there until I retired but he wanted to get all of out that had all the vacation. And I read that in a book later that the CEO was getting big money and they wanted to cut down on some of their expense so they could get rid of the people who had a

lot of years of vacation. Several of us had been there all the time. We had – I had seven weeks. So then he got someone who only had two and I went over on Pauline and got a job at the hospital.

I stayed there 14 years. So I retired at 72. It was a lot of work at the hospital –

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but that's a good place to work 'cause there are always going to be sick people or people getting hurt in accidents and what have you. So I never was without a job. And as far as growing up – It was a lot of work. I've really done a lot of work. And as I graduated – I mean retired – then I have taken care of my grandbaby. My older son had a child and they brought her to me and I kept her for six year.

She's now in the ninth grade (she was last year) at Central. So I kept her six years and then she was going to school downtown at the downtown school. And even down on the farm I did a lot of work 'cause my father grew everything: all kinds of vegetables –

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and watermelons. Right now we would still be hoeing because we always tried to get through by the 4th of July with the hoeing. Then when we came out of the field – We didn't have refrigerators back then and we had to can everything for the winter.

So I was always busy canning – you know peeling peaches or getting something ready for canning because we had to have lots and lots of jars because it was a big family. My younger sister was born after I left. So while I was there it was ten – eleven and then my aunt lived there a while 'cause her husband left her when he was in service in WW II, and she stayed with us several years. But the Lord has blessed me 'cause I did all that work and I'm still –

Most people that I knew are not even alive,

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those down there and some of those that I worked with at the hospital have already gone. I'm thankful that I'm here. The church I was _____ was down at – right outside the Y. It was Mount **Nebo**. So I just still – I don't change fast. I just still go back there because I'm familiar with it. Even though most of those people

have gone on. But it'll always be so full on Sunday. But many, many people that I used to know have already passed on.

That was at Mt. Nebo. But I still go back there.

Makia Crump: Are you or were you married?

Hattie Tucker: Oh I married in 1951 and I moved in the house. I'm still in the same house that I moved in. I attempted a couple of times – Well once after I'd been there for a while we went out looking for a house. We went down on Third Street. There was a theater down there and up above –

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that theater to the left they had built some real nice houses. And we looked at them but they had the same amount of bedrooms. It was no larger and it didn't have a den. So what I did – I just came back and we added a den to our house.

'Cause the price had doubled the price that I had paid on that house. So that's – And then another time I started – When my husband passed I was thinking about getting another house but he had some bills that I had to pay. When someone passes on if they have bills – like they get some money on something – So he had just picked up a car and my name was on it. So I had to go ahead and pay that. I wasn't too upset 'cause he was a good husband.

Makia Crump: What was your spouse's name and occupation?

Hattie Tucker: What?

Makia Crump: What was your spouse's name and occupation?

Hattie Tucker: My name and occupation?

Makia Crump: Your spouse's name and occupation.

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Hattie Tucker: Oh he was a chauffeur and a messenger. At that time cotton was big. You know they bought cotton and this place was down on by Goldsmith's downtown and he worked down there. He was a chauffeur for the Barringer's and a messenger – taking messages. But they bought cotton. When the farmers in the south and

everywhere picked that cotton they bought it because they had more money.

They black people had to get rid of it right then. And they could save it until the price doubled. And so they made lots of money on cotton. They called it cotton row down there. And these merchants made a lot of money buying cotton. So he got a job with them. While the season was being like now he didn't have a lot to do but they still kept him and had him doing a few things –

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doing messenger jobs and so forth - the men. Work got real busy when cotton picking time came. But this was in the fall.

Makia Crump:

Now let's talk a little bit about your experiences growing up. Can you tell me about the neighborhood you grew up in?

Hattie Tucker:

Well when I grew up, as I said segregation was on, and we walked to school. I didn't go until I was six or seven because I had to wait until my brother was old enough so the two of us could walk. It was about three miles I guess. We walked that every day. We always walked to school. And let me see it was further down – called Livingston. Livingston was at Harrier further down on the other side. See I lived at Madison Station when I was – That's where I was born at Madison further down.

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And of course we didn't get that house – that government house until '38. My father got a loan and got in the government house. And so when I was down at Livingston we always walked to school. And when we moved to where the house that – My family is all back there. Everybody went back but me. And they divided the land up and added some to it. I have four sisters there and two brothers and all the rest of my family. I had four brothers that passed away.

But they still live there and have nice homes. And when we moved down there where the family lives now the school wasn't very far. But they didn't have but two teachers. One teacher taught the first grades. It went to the eighth grade. Eighth grade? Let me see –

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I'm just trying to see how to get that. But anyway I got to high school in 19 – just before the war started. I went to Camel Street in Canton. But we had to board there because the transportation wasn't like it is now.

We'd board at someone's house. You'd go to town and your family will get you a house to board in. I boarded at two different houses. But that was pretty good. And I wasn't far from the school then.

Makia Crump: What was school like for you?

Hattie Tucker: That was high school. Huh?

Makia Crump: What was school like for you?

Hattie Tucker: Well it was a little dull but I made it. I didn't have any clothes like children have – a lot of neat stuff like they have today. But we made it.

Makia Crump: How did integration –

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and segregation impact your educational experiences?

Hattie Tucker: Hmm?

Makia Crump: How did integration and segregation impact your educational experiences?

Hattie Tucker: Well we did all right. We had a principal and his wife were – They were our principal. It was a husband and wife that were the principals at school and they were pretty nice. They wanted you to do the right thing. It was right in the town of Canton and so she was careful about teaching us not to be up there running around the town. She wanted us to have good morals. Mr. and Mrs. Rogers. So we went out during the day – We went out for one hour. I understand now they don't hardly go out for recreation.

They take recreation inside the building they were telling me. But we went out for an hour –

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and professor Rogers would sit way up in the window upstairs so he could look out over the ground. So you knew not to –

Everybody knew not to act out. I think children paid more attention to adults than I notice they do today. Y'all – I know y'all are some of the best but some of them don't pay a lot of attention to adults. They have to – They finally do when they let them know they mean business. 'Cause my daughter and son have the camp over there.

It's right over there on Mt. Moriah. ____ Moriah's gym right off of Lauderdale. They have about 60 children.

Makia Crump: What church or churches have you attended?

Hattie Tucker: Mt. Nebo. That's right at Vance and Lauderdale.

Makia Crump: Can you describe the church?

Hattie Tucker: Well the church is an old church.

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I think the last anniversary they said it was 108 years old but it's been refurbished. And people like the architecture of it inside. It has high ceilings so we get a lot of compliments of the architecture of that church. So I've been there since I came to town. I went to Metropolitan a little but then I decided – I had to work a lot of Sundays and I could go in the morning if I was working 3:00 PM to 11:00 PM or 11:00 PM to 7:00 PM. If I was working in the morning like 7:00 AM to 3:00 PM I could go to church at night.

They always had night service back then. They don't have it now. The pastor's grown old.

Makia Crump: What kinds of activities were you involved in coming up?

Hattie Tucker: Oh in the church? Oh yeah I grew up – Even at my home church I was a Sunday school secretary. And we used to go to conventions –

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myself and the delegates, the superintendent. So I was always involved in church work. Then when I came here I was working a lot of Sundays but I would still go to church every Sunday. And after I got where I wasn't working as much I just got as the usher. Once I got in the choir briefly but the choir had to have practices during the week. So I just got on the usher board.

We'd just have a meeting about once a month so it was being an usher. And I just stopped ushering recently.

Cameron Jones: Okay what does South Memphis mean to you?

Hattie Tucker: Well I like South Memphis. Even on my street when I came there were a lot of professional people: teachers and postal workers. They were all professional. And I think of –

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all of those I'm about the only one left from Third Street to Bellevue on my street. But there were a lot of professional people – seamstresses. And these were very, very –

Cameron Jones: How would you describe South Memphis in the '60s and '70s.

Hattie Tucker: Oh it was – Really like I said it was all these nice people. But they treat me nice. I still like being where I am because _____ Foster has their children there and all of them – I call them my second church family because they've always been very nice. The people that work there have been very nice to deal with and they have plenty of light there 'cause they have three street lights on the campus there. And so you look out at night it's safe. And they've always treated me very nice.

Cameron Jones: What was going on in South Memphis in the '60s and '70s?

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Hattie Tucker: Well during the '60s and '70s my children went to the school at Walker Avenue. They call it (muffled) now – right up the street. And I liked being there 'cause I was close to that and I worked in the PTA. At one point I was president. They had a lot – I think they had more PTA meetings back then. We had – Charles Patterson was our principal there at one time. He got to be a minister and he moved on to doing something at the Board of Education when he left there.

But he had grown up in South Memphis. Well South Memphis was real big at the time. And when I bought my house you couldn't buy any further back that way. The park went on. They were not selling through (muffled) at that time.

Cameron Jones: How is South Memphis different now than from when you were coming up?

Hattie Tucker: Well it's just that all those old people –

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have died and so many of their properties were left and they're being torn down. I look back that way when I go as far as Parkwood to the south. All of those – the ones that had the beautiful homes back then they're being torn down because – What happened is their heirs probably – Even the mayor has said that. They're probably in California or some other state and so they didn't come back to resume this property.

They move out and the gangs get in there and set it afire. They're real bad about it now – setting it on fire. You all have heard of gangs. They're out here at night 'cause they write graffiti on the buildings – right on the buildings of Reverend Foster.

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You all haven't been down to his property have you? Well they've been writing on it at night and breaking the windows out.

Cameron Jones: With new renovations in South Memphis like College Park are you hopeful about the future of South Memphis?

Hattie Tucker: Well I think – I know what happened down in my hometown. This property where I was living; about five years ago the property was – I think I had about three acres from my – It was heir property that was left to me where my father lived and it was \$5.00 an acre. Now it's \$22,000.00. They're selling. I mean the tax was \$5.00. Now they're selling their property at \$22,000.00 an acre. 'Cause what they did; they came in there – the county. I think it's the county came. They build churches and schools and people put up condominiums.

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So property has gone sky high. Just like gas has gone up here the property has gone up there. So I suspect that could happen here, that in a few years – Well Reverend Foster is buying up a lot of it because he doesn't have to pay tax on being a church. But right now he's buying up a lot of – They have a garden over there and he's got some apartments he's got to refurbish in the near future.

But that also helps him make it look better. Now they're keeping the grass down.

And he also has a church. He goes and he picks up members. That's helping the younger people to think better and do better. 'Cause there are some just walking around doing nothing and going wild.

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If you listen to the news you hear about them getting killed every night. Just like every week somebody gets killed and they're 19, 20, 21, and 22. They're doing better. As a matter of fact they're not farming. Back then they were busy working and they stayed out of trouble.

That's why when I was a young girl you didn't hear – hardly ever hear about anybody getting killed. But now just listen at the news. Every week they're getting killed. You've got the drugs in here and different stuff. They're not busy. Back then the boys would go hunting to kill rabbits. They have some that do now even down home. The land is posted. You can't hunt anymore. So therefore those down there are not doing anything.

Cameron Jones: How would you compare living in a rural area to living in suburban Memphis?

Hattie Tucker: Well I was just busy working –

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out on the farm in the rural area. And I didn't want to stay because like just last month it was raining two and three nights a week and it was right at the time when you were supposed to be working. So that was what drove pressure on me – knowing that you couldn't get out there and get your work done. And the grass would be growing. So I said to myself, "I don't want to be here." I was blessed to get away from the farm.

Cameron Jones: Is there any advice that you would want to give young people in South Memphis now?

Hattie Tucker: Well wherever you are you've just got to get busy and not get with what they call the in crowd out there that's doing nothing and getting in trouble. 'Cause they're building bigger jails, I'll tell you.

I know you all know about it if you read the paper or listen to the news. And if you don't have an education – And rent now is –

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\$600.00 a month. I see every once in a while somebody comes out there and gets food out there at the dumpster and eat it.

'Cause if you don't have any money how can you rent a house when it's \$600.00 a month. When I was a teenager – I mean when I first came to Memphis I lived at the Y and I think I paid \$10.00 every two weeks. Prices have gone up. They're pulling the rug out from under. So get busy. And even if you get an education sometimes it might be in a field where there's not much to do. And you can't get a job. I don't know what profession you're thinking about getting in.

But I would get into one where there are lots of jobs. And I'll tell you in nursing there are –

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always going to be sick people and there are always going to be people getting hurt. Just the other day and accident – this week – threw those people out of the van and killed a baby. So somebody's always getting hurt. They're dashing up and down the road real fast and they have an accident. Nobody wants to have an accident and nobody wants to see anybody get killed.

But you could be there to help them when they come to the hospital. And there are lots of hospitals too so you can always get a job in a hospital. But some people want to go in an easy, bright-sounding field and they run out of work.

Cameron Jones: We would like to thank you for participating in a Crossroads to Freedom Project.

Hattie Tucker: Okay. It was nice of you to – And I hope I have said something that will –

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