

Damesha Boone: On behalf of Cross Roads to Freedom, Rose College and Knowledge Quiz I want to thank you for taking the time to share your story with us today. I'm Damesha Boone.

Dontray Herman: And I'm Dontray Herman.

Damesha Boone: And I'm honored to meet you and learn from your inspirational story. Today's interview will be archived online at Cross Roads to Freedom website. Today's date is June 25th, 2014.

Can you state some basic background information for the record. What is your name?

Pearl Pegues: Pearl Crosby Pegues.

Damesha Boone: If you don't mind me asking, what year were you born?

Pearl Pegues: 1939.

Damesha Boone: Where were you born and raised?

Pearl Pegues: I was born in Marriott, Arkansas. I was raised in Memphis, Tennessee at 616 Williams Avenue.

Damesha Boone: Did you like where you grew up in Arkansas?

Pearl Pegues: I didn't grow up in Arkansas at all. I was brought to Memphis when I was some months old.

Damesha Boone: Did you enjoy the little time you --?

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Pearl Pegues: Well, I was too little. I was in the arms when they brought me to Memphis.

Damesha Boone: What is your occupation?

Pearl Pegues: I'm retired. I'm ___ secretary now.

Damesha Boone: Did you enjoy being a secretary?

Pearl Pegues: I loved it.

Damesha Boone: Did you ever marry?

Pearl Pegues: Yes.

Damesha Boone: When did you marry?

Pearl Pegues: I married the first time when I was about 18 going on 19. The second time I married I was 42.

Damesha Boone: What is or what was your name -- your spouse's name and occupation?

Pearl Pegues: Okay, my first husband's name was Sam Burke. He worked for the VA. And he was so many steps -- I forget how many steps he was. When he was -- he was kind of up there, you know in steps. But he was -- we worked in the pharmacy in north Chicago, Illinois.

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And he worked as a nursing assistant when he came to Memphis in the VA.

My second husband's name was Thomas Pegues. And he was from a railroad family background. You know they worked for the railroad. And then his last job was ____.

Damesha Boone: Did you have any children, if so what were their names?

Pearl Pegues: I have one son. His name is Sean William Burke.

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

Pearl Pegues: The neighborhood I grew up in was Williams Avenue, north of west side of Mississippi Boulevard. It was very, very nice.

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Everybody kept the paper out of the yards, the bottles out of the yards. Everything was just honky-dory there. I can tell you that. And we knew everybody on the block.

Damesha Boone: So you can say that home life was good?

Pearl Pegues: Beautiful.

Damesha Boone: Who were your parents and what were they like?

Pearl Pegues: Okay, my father's name was Clarence Crosby, Senior. My mother's name was Jennie Taylor Crosby. She was a homemaker. She did not work. My father worked for Illinois Central ____ Railroad. And he also was a ____, so that kept my mom at home.

Damesha Boone: What schools did you attend?

Pearl Pegues: I attended Pots Kindergarten. And graduated Pots Kindergarten. I

went to the Lutheran Cooperative School on Edith and from there to Washington High School.

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Damesha Boone: Did you enjoy school?

Pearl Pegues: Loved it.

Damesha Boone: What churches did you attend and what were they like?

Pearl Pegues: Well, I always attended and was a member as I am now of Centenary United Methodist Church. It was at Austin and Mississippi Boulevard. So I was in the church all my life. But we used to visit churches, because my neighbors across the street were members of Pentecostal Temple. So I used to go at the Methodist Church at the time. We did not have night services. So I would go with them. And then my Dad sometimes he would take those visiting churches in the afternoon he would take me and my two brothers.

Damesha Boone: So did you enjoy church?

Pearl Pegues: Yes, I did.

Damesha Boone: Can you share some of the memories from your childhood that influenced you later on in life?

Pearl Pegues: Some of the memories. Well, I always wanted to be a secretary.

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I always wanted to be in charge. And be in the union secretary you had to be in charge, because you had to really control the flow of the desk and the doctor's office and the nurse's questions and they would ask you. You would have to know. You had to be on your toes.

Damesha Boone: So would you say becoming a union secretary was a dream come true?

Pearl Pegues: Well, not really, because my first dream was to be an elementary education teacher. I went to Tennessee State University in Nashville after I graduated high school. And that was my major, but I wanted to marry against my parent's rule. They did not want me to marry. They did not know I was married. I slipped off and got married. That was my first love to teach school.

Damesha Boone: How was the experience to marry against your parent's wishes?

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Pearl Pegues: Well, you know when you're young you don't think about how they gonna take it. It's just something you want to do. And that's what I did, because I was a spoil brat. I was the only girl when two older brothers. And my mom you know she spoiled me. I was the only girl, but it was nice. It was nice.

Dontray Herman: Let's talk about life in south Memphis. What does south Memphis mean to you?

Pearl Pegues: Well, south Memphis at the time, not now, it meant family life. You had a good childhood life, because when Christmas came we couldn't wait for Christmas. Everybody from Dixie Homes, Blue Homes, Memorial Gardens, different sections of the city came on Williams Avenue to skate on that hill. It was a hill to skate on.

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And we loved it. We could not wait for Christmas morning to get a pair of Union Hardware Skates.

Dontray Herman: What was going on in south Memphis in the '60's and '70's?

Pearl Pegues: I was not there in the '60's and '70's, because see I went away to Tennessee State in '58. And I left there the following year, the first of the year in '59. When I slipped off and got married. So I don't know about the '60's and '70's. But my mom was really disgusted. She would tell me -- she said since they have opened the **Jumping Rail Liquor Store** over on **Crumb** Boulevard, she said these people come through the ally all the times of night and she was just disgusted with it.

You know because when we were coming up our house was sitting right there on the ally. The ally was clean as the street. There was no rubbish or anything. So that's the only thing that I know about at that period.

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Dontray Herman: How was south Memphis different from now and when you was coming up?

Pearl Pegues: Well, you got a difference -- what should I say? A different set of people. When we were coming up everybody was really nice. We never saw the police in our neighborhood. Mommas and daddies didn't fight. You didn't hear any cursing and stuff going up and down the street. It was just a lovely place to be.

Dontray Herman: What were your neighbors like in south Memphis?

Pearl Pegues: Very nice and caring. They looked out for all of us. But you know how children are they don't like all the neighbors because they think they're too nosey, but they're just really there to make sure that you don't get hurt.

Dontray Herman: What were the reputation of south Memphis -- the reputation of south Memphis?

Pearl Pegues: At the time I was coming up from 39 to 58 the reputation was tops.

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We wanted -- everybody wanted to live in south Memphis, because that was the place to be. But not now.

Dontray Herman: What are some places in south Memphis that make it a better place to live?

Pearl Pegues: That made it a better place to live? Well, most people in south Memphis at the time were homeowners. And they cared about their property. And the surroundings, so that was -- that was it.

Dontray Herman: What is the best thing about south Memphis?

Pearl Pegues: The best thing about south Memphis, well, that you were close to your schools, your churches, and in the summertime you had vacation bible school that most of us attended. You know from one church to the other, but it was all in south Memphis right around each other.

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Dontray Herman: What do you think would make south Memphis a better place?

Pearl Pegues: Well, it's gonna take a lot to bring south Memphis back to where it used to be.

Dontray Herman: With new -- where we at?

Damesha Boone: We're right there.

Dontray Herman: With new renovations in south Memphis like College Park, are you hopeful about the future of south Memphis?

Pearl Pegues: Well, if they get the right people in administration around here and keep building places like College Park and govern them as they should be, yeah, you could bring -- I believe you could bring south Memphis back. But it has a lot of work to be done.

Dontray Herman: Do you have any fond memories of your life in south Memphis you want to share?

Pearl Pegues: Only my fond memories of south Memphis is my neighbors, skating at Christmas time, being able to go out and play ball, but we had to be in the house by 6:30.

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But you had to get your lesson before you get out there and play. I had piano lessons. My brother had saxophone lessons. So we'd get out there and play our hearts out until about 6:30 and then we had to go in the house.

Dontray Herman: Is there any advice that you would want young people in south Memphis to know?

Pearl Pegues: Yes, pull your pants up. Keep your haircut. Look decent and know how to present yourself.

Dontray Herman: Is there anything you would like to add on that we haven't covered?

Pearl Pegues: No, you've asked about everything that I can help you with or talk with you about.

Dontray Herman: Thank you for participating in the Rose College of Freedom Project.

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How would you compare living in Illinois to living in Memphis?

Pearl Pegues: I liked Illinois. It was fine. Where I lived and my home that we had there was nice. Compared to Memphis there is no comparison.

Dontray Herman: Now can you give us some specific about south Memphis?

Pearl Pegues: About south Memphis? The only thing I can tell you about south Memphis like I had stated earlier it was a great place to live. You had nice neighbors. You had nice churches. You had nice schools. Of course back in the day, we walked from Williams Avenue all the way over to Edith on Saxon to school. We didn't go to Rose. Rose was the only public school down near us. But my older brother he was real shy.

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And a fellow took his books and my mom said, "No more public school." We started going to private schools.

Damesha Boone: Did you like the school that you went to?

Pearl Pegues: Loved it. As a matter of fact we had a contest and I named -- we colors of the school Kelly green and white. And it's still in existence today as long as I can remember. The school is gone.

Dontray Herman: Okay, thank you for participating in the Cross Road Freedom --

Damesha Boone: Wait.

Pearl Pegues: Mrs. Bracy was the lady that I was trying to remember that helped found Tri-State _____. Central Baptist Church was there at the time. It was at Austin and Mississippi Boulevard.

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I told you about ____ Cleaners. All the way down Mississippi Boulevard there was the firehouse. And children back in the day they used to get a kick out of calling the fire department and saying there was a fire and giving the address of their barn is on fire. You know they did stuff like that. We weren't jewels now. We did things. You knew who was doing and let's see -- I think I got ahead of myself. And then also there was a neighborhood club, the elder women had a neighborhood club. They made sure that things were kept neat and clean and it was just nice.

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I mean that's just about all I can tell you. And it was a safe place to be.

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