Mackenzie: On behalf of the Crossroads to Freedom program, we'd like to thank you for taking time off your schedule to speak to us. For the record, could you please state your name?

Dixie: My name is Bertha K Brown, but my known is Dixie Brown.

Mackenzie: And where were you born?

Dixie: I was born in Boston, Massachusetts.

Mackenzie: In what year?

Dixie: 1922.

Mackenzie: What was your occupation?

Dixie: I was a medical secretary.

Mackenzie: Who were your parents?

Dixie: Edward P. Kennedy, and Bertha Kelly.

Mackenzie: And what were their occupations?

Dixie: Oh, my mother was a homemaker and my father was a registrar of voters for the city of Boston.

Mackenzie: Did they have any relation to the Kennedy – the presidential –

Dixie: No. But I grew up about four blocks from them.

Mackenzie: Really?

Dixie: Yes.

Mackenzie: Wow, that's fascinating.

Dixie: In Brookline, Massachusetts.

Mackenzie: Brookline, Massachusetts?

Dixie: Yeah.

Mackenzie: *[0:01:00]* Did you have any siblings?

Dixie: I had one sister four years older than I.

Mackenzie: And what was her occupation later in life?

Dixie: She was a speech teacher.

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

Dixie: Oh, it was a typical middleclass neighborhood, individual houses owned by the occupants, quiet. The police walked a beat in the evening. I walked to elementary school. We had an hour off for lunch. I'd come home for lunch. And we were out by 3:30.

We played trick or treat and marked on the street for hop scotch.

Courtney: And what was your home life like?

Dixie: Serene, I'm grateful to say.

[0:02:00]

Courtney: And do you remember what kinds of activities you were involved in at this time?

Dixie: Oh, I really don't. I belonged to a high school sorority and I really don't remember.

Courtney: Mm-hmm. Okay. And can you share some memories that stick out in your memory from your childhood that have influenced you?

Dixie: Well, I can't stay childhood. Young adult I was working at the Boston Children's Hospital, and it was WWII, and so I took all sorts of courses for attending the sick, and I was active in volunteering at a local hospital, which was the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital, now known I think as the Boston Women's Hospital.

[0:03:00]

Courtney: Okay. I'm going to ask you about your educational experiences. Where did you go to elementary school?

Dixie: The Francis W. Parker School.

Courtney: And where'd you go to middle school and high school?

Dixie: High school, I went to Brookline High School. We had moved from Quincy, Massachusetts to Brookline, which is a short car ride away.

Courtney: Okay. And what did you do after you left high school?

Dixie: I went to Catherine Gibbs School there in the city of Boston.

Courtney: And what was that like for you?

Dixie: Challenging because it was strenuous study. All-girls school. I lived at home so I commuted, and we studied and worked very hard.

Courtney: And do you remember if integration or segregation impacted your school experience at all?

Dixie: We had one African American boy in our class of over – I'm going to say, 596 students. One.

[0:04:00]
Courtney: Wow.

Dixie: Can you imagine how lonesome or isolated he must have seemed?

Courtney: Yeah. And did religion play a role in your life growing up?

Dixie: Very much. Very much. And continues to.

Courtney: Okay. Do you remember what church you belonged to?

Dixie: Yes. St. Aiden's Church.

Courtney: Okay. And could you describe church for you?

Dixie: Well, it was just around the corner, and we were very conscientious about attending every Sunday. My sister and my mother and father and I walked to church, and as I grew older, I became more dependent on church, and today I go to morning Mass and have since 1967.

Courtney: Wow.

Mackenzie: Do you attend Mass every day still?

Dixie: Yes. Including today.

[0:05:00]
Courtney: And could you tell me a little bit about your family? At this point, I know we're switching.

Dixie: I have a story because my sister and I married brothers. My sister married first, in 1945 I think, and he was active in the service, came back with an elaborate trip because they were mustering out of the Army, and they were on the West Coast, came to Boston, and my then – I don't know him, Charlie asked if he could join them because he had got out of the Navy and he hadn't had any time off, could he come up to Boston and ride back with them? And they said sure.

[0:06:00] Well, I fought that. I thought I was going to inherit someone I didn't want, and so we went what we called Down Maine, and the acquaintance flowered from there.

Courtney: And what year were you guys married?

Dixie: Forty-seven.

Courtney: Okay. Did you guys have any children?

Dixie: Seven.

Courtney: Oh, wow.

Dixie: Uh-huh.

Courtney: Okay.

Mackenzie: All right. So now we're going to talk a little bit about post-WWII era. When did you move to Memphis from the Northeast?

Dixie: In 1947, as a bride.

Mackenzie: And what were some of your first impressions of Memphis after moving from the Northeast?

Dixie: It was truly a culture shock. We stopped – we came back by car. We stopped because there was a traffic jam due to the Cotton Carnival, and it suddenly dawned upon me that I was here in Memphis for the rest of my life, and it was quite an awakening.

[0:07:00] There was strange little things like they would say, "Come back," or, "Come to see me," but they never said what time or what day. So I interpreted it as insincere, and that was difficult. But my sister was living here, too, and she proved to be a life-saver because she was able to adjust before I came.

Mackenzie: What was it like trying to raise a family at this time?

Dixie: We moved to Marion, Arkansas and it was an ideal town to raise children. If it took a village according to Hillary Clinton, it took the town of Marion. Everybody cared about everybody's children. And I could let them run and play and somebody might call and say, "Can Kelly stay for lunch?" and it was relaxed and
[0:08:00] trustworthy. It was ideal.

Mackenzie: Why did you move to Marion, Arkansas?

Dixie: This – because we bought a house, and it was the old Methodist Parsonage, and we bought it by sealed bid and the church parish accepted our bid.

Mackenzie: How long did you live in Marion, Arkansas?

Dixie: Eighteen years.

Mackenzie: And so you move back to – did you move to Evergreen, in the Evergreen neighborhood after that?

Dixie: Yes. Yes.

Mackenzie: What was that like at that time?

Dixie: Well, my husband taught at Tech High School, so it was convenient, and we had four children in school in Memphis at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, so with four children and every child who went to private school in Marion asked for a ride from Charlie Brown, and he gave it. So, it was a natural to move to Memphis, and close to the school.

[0:09:00]
Mackenzie: What year was this that you moved back to Memphis?

Dixie: Sixty-seven.

Mackenzie: Sixty-seven. That's a pivotal time.

Dixie: Yes.

Mackenzie: What was it like trying to – what were some of the morals you felt that you wanted to instill in your children at this time?

Dixie: Well, this is a for-instance. The first year we lived there, we have five bicycles stolen. In Marion, they'd just leave the bicycles somewhere, and someone would call in the evening and say, "I

took your bike and I rode home. It's at my house." Well, my children weren't used to having them stolen, and it was challenging, to say the least.

Mackenzie: To what extent did the civil rights movement affect your experience at this time?

Dixie: Well, one of my neighbors was Francis Coe, and if you remember, she was very active in the integration of the schools. And the administration building is named after her for the school system. I

[0:10:00] was challenged because my children – I had one at Immaculate Conception, one at Tech High School, five at Snowden, and then they started to spread them out. I had a child at Bruce. And finally, I went to the headquarters of the school system, and said that I was in the minority at Snowden School, and that I requested to have my three youngest children in one school at Snowden. And they had to observe my request.

Mackenzie: Were you a member of any organizations at this time, apart from church life?

Dixie: Oh, of course the PTA. No, I think not. You know, I was just
[0:11:00] taken from a small town and put in the middle of the big city.

Mackenzie: What was the sentiment regarding integration, segregation issues of the PTA at this time?

Dixie: Well, when I moved in '67, you – I went to the first PTA meeting at Snowden, it was so well-attended that the auditorium was full and I had to stand outside while the band play, and one young man played triple-tongue trumpet and I was impressed. Snowden was a very good school. I can't say I sensed prejudice at all when I first moved here. I also had an African American teacher to one of my children, Sandy, and she impressed me because she spoke and

[0:12:00] said, "You aren't going to let somebody tell you want to think," and she said that to my child. And interestingly enough, she didn't have her child in public school.

Mackenzie: Were there any noticeable difference between race relations in Marion and Memphis when you moved?

Dixie: Well there – yes. The African Americans were farm people, farm help, poorly educated. They took time out to pick the cotton crop and I hate to say this, but they were nonexistent really. You didn't pay any attention to them. They came in from the farm on

Saturdays and visited and bought their few items from the store. But they'd gather and visit. So integration really hadn't touched
[0:13:00] Marion. I'm being brutally frank.

Mackenzie: Regarding this time period, were you active in politics at any level? Did you have strong political convictions?

Dixie: No, I really didn't. I think my husband who was born in Mississippi and raised in Memphis and West Memphis had strong feelings, but I didn't. And I revert you back to my original answer of I had seven children, so I wasn't active outside the house but very little. Oh, I was a member of the women's part of the junior chamber of commerce, which I enjoyed, and I was what they called a PEL, which is a sorority for women.

Mackenzie: How did your Catholic upbringing influence your views about civil
[0:14:00] rights and what was going on at this time in the late '60s?

Dixie: We didn't have any African American in the church in West Memphis, and I don't think there are a whole lot there now. But I don't think it played a great role in my reactions and thoughts.

Mackenzie: So your views were for the most part separate – in terms of race, separate from your upbringing?

Dixie: No, just passive acceptance. I could describe it that way.

Mackenzie: To what extent has that evolved over time, if you'd like to comment on that?

Dixie: Well, when I went to Immaculate Conception – the Cathedral, I was pleased to find that they had an active – a genuine active part in the church functions, and they were truly melded in, and that made me feel good.

[0:15:00]
Mackenzie: Let's talk for a moment about the sanitation strike of 1968. Do you recall the events leading up to the assassination of Dr. King?

Dixie: Vividly. But that was my first year in Memphis.

Mackenzie: What was that like in your neighborhood, for example, in Evergreen?

Dixie: Well, you know, it cast a cloud over the whole city. And there was an air of regret and sorrow and fear, and we whispered, and that says something. They didn't go out, they didn't drive because of

course we had a curfew in the city. I was active at St. Patrick, and they would gather bags of groceries to support the strikers. And there was a sign on the side of the church, one of the columns that
[0:16:00] said not to decide, is to decide. And it took me a long time to understand what that said.

Mackenzie: What were your – do you have personal convictions about the sanitation workers' cause?

Dixie: Oh –

Mackenzie: How did you view it?

Dixie: I felt that they had an undesirable job, and that they should be compensated. To what degree I wasn't in a position to measure because I didn't have a sense of – the sense of money that I had was an intimate one with my own income, which was a teacher's salary from my husband.

Mackenzie: So did you feel it was more of an economic issue than a racial issue? Or were they –

Dixie: The strikers?

Mackenzie: Yes.

Dixie: Oh, I think it was economic.

Mackenzie: In Evergreen, was trash piling up on the streets in your neighborhood? What was that like, the atmosphere at the time?

[0:17:00]
Dixie: See, I don't remember the trash building up. But you see, we didn't put our waste on the street. There's an alley that goes down behind our street where it's picked up to this day, and perhaps it was out of sight. Maybe out of sight – it couldn't be out of mind.

Mackenzie: What were some of your memories surrounding the assassination – the aftermath of the assassination of Dr. King?

Dixie: There again, a fear, a pall over the city. I was ashamed for this whole city, and I can't say I remember distinctly, but of course, the whole city reacted. And there again we had fear. Such
[0:18:00] superstitions as, "Don't get on the elevator if there's a single African American man on the elevator. You don't know what would happen."

Mackenzie: How did your neighbors feel about this, and how did this affect the Evergreen neighborhood?

Dixie: I can't answer for others. I know my neighbors on one side, on the north, were southern through and through, and their thinking was southern through and through. The other side was a young widowed woman with three boys, and I guess she was southern. But see, I reeked north, so they understood how I felt.

Mackenzie: How did your friends perceive you as a northerner? What set you apart from women that you termed southern through and through?

[0:19:00]
Dixie: I would have to ponder that. I think my manner of speech was one thing. I guess my quick judgment, I hate to own up to it, but was another. My dress, my education in some ways, my sophisticated experiences. I guess that was it.

Mackenzie: Well, Courtney's going to ask you some questions now related specifically to Evergreen following the assassination of Dr. King and the I-40 controversy.

Courtney: I know you mentioned earlier that there were some very distinguished people in the Evergreen neighborhood, and I wanted to ask you about what your initial impressions of the neighborhood were, and kind of talk about that in ___?

Dixie: We moved there because we felt that it was desirable and attractive, and dependable. Not changing much. And we had

[0:20:00] some wonderful – we have still a beautiful atmosphere of friendship and caring. We had people on our block like Chancellor Robert Hoffman, who made some very definite decisions, particularly at the time that the firemen and the police struck, which affected the whole city. We had W. H. Durham, whose foundation still serves us in the city. I think he favored the senior citizen.

Let me see. We had – Mayor Ingram lived the next block down on Stonewall. There were others. I would have to think about that.

Courtney: And when you arrived in Evergreen, what were some of the events that were shaping the neighborhood that you could see?

[0:21:00]
Dixie: None.

Courtney: *(Laughing)*

Dixie: I must admit, I stir waters. I'm what we call a stem-winder, and it was my husband's 60th birthday, and I asked his permission, and I went around with invitations, knocked on the doors, introduced myself, and asked them if they would come for a potluck supper, and they all came. And it was from then on we had the wonderful custom, not every Friday, but we'd say TGIF, and each one would bring whatever their choice was of beverage and something for the table. Grazing food: potato chips and dips, and hors devour, and we were telling each other how good we were. And we believed it.

Courtney: Well, do you remember anything about Evergreen in the '70s?

[0:22:00]

Dixie: Yes, it's hard for me to move decade to decade.

Mackenzie: For example, the I-40 Expressway controversy in Overton Park?

Dixie: When we were looking at houses, they warned us that that was going to take place – the houses were going to be torn down. And of course it's so easy to tear down rather than build up or express patience. So the houses were torn down before the final decision was made. And they were beautiful homes. And we had big vacancies at that time. It was very hard to think that they would pull them down. I was proud that they fought it so much and so long.

Courtney: Did any of your friends and neighbors move to the suburbs during this controversy?

Dixie: No. We stayed put.

[0:23:00]

Courtney: And what are some of the challenges that Evergreen faces today?

Dixie: Well, I will say – now, I'm going back, I guess to the '70s, they were going to tear down a house, a very lovely house, on the – wait a minute – east-south-east corner of Poplar and Stonewall, and build a McDonalds there. That united us. And I think that was the birth of the Evergreen Association because we united to fight it, and we were successful, and it grew from there.

Courtney: Looking back on that, do you remember feeling like you were about to start something major?

Dixie: If major was just my intimate neighbors, yes, because it's still going on. And they said, "Oh, we didn't know it was Charlie's

[0:24:00] birthday." And I said, "No, I didn't intend for you to know it. But I'm giving you the gift. I'm giving you each other." And they still value that.

Courtney: That's neat.

Mackenzie: Do you still have an official role in the Evergreen _____ ____ District Association?

Dixie: No. No. Never have, except in the very beginning.

Mackenzie: Just generally speaking, how would you compare living in Massachusetts to living in the mid-south in Tennessee and Arkansas? What are some of the major differences in your mind?

Dixie: Oh, well, basic – the dwellings: apartment houses in the north. Transportation: street cars, busses. Many didn't drive their cars to work because of trying to dispose of them once they got to work. And the pace was a whole lot faster in Massachusetts. I can't

[0:25:00] speak of the businesses of Arkansas because those were – my friend's civil engineer working for themselves. But Memphis – of course, I'm living in an area where the houses are individually owned, and good part of Memphis is made up of subdivisions and groups living in clusters with homes. And I think they far out-number apartment dwellers.

Mackenzie: What do you feel that Memphis could learn from the Northeast in terms of its urban infrastructure, if anything?

Dixie: You're putting me in a corner, and I'm not going to go there. Sorry. I take the fifth.

(Laughing)

Mackenzie: You may speak candidly, please. It's just – is there anything that – did you ever feel frustrated by the pacing? The difference in pacing ___ Northeast?

[0:26:00]

Dixie: Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. And by the education. I'm not saying it's this way now, but I had a man make a statement, he came from the north and he was one that had a position of authority, he said that the Arkansas State was equivalent to a high school in the north. And I really felt that way. I don't, of course, now. But our high school – well, I attended the second-highest ranked high school in the country.

Mackenzie: Did you ever consider moving back to the Northeast at any point?

Dixie: No.

Mackenzie: Why was that?

Dixie: Well, because my husband's work was here. He was teaching, and there'd be no call for me to do that, unless I left my husband, and I
[0:27:00] hadn't entertained that thought at all.

Mackenzie: How would you compare race relations in Memphis to the 1960s to the present?

Dixie: It's hard to evaluate. I think there's still a strong prejudice. I think there are those who don't want to recognize it, but I don't think we can say that we're totally integrated in any fashion. We co-exist.

Mackenzie: What do you think could bring us closer together?

Dixie: Education.

Mackenzie: Is there any advice that you would want younger Memphians to know, and if so, what would you tell younger Memphians to improve their city?

Dixie: Education. They have to be open to education. It's the only way
[0:28:00] out of the ghetto.

Mackenzie: Is there anything that you'd like to add that we've not discussed at this point?

Dixie: Yes, because you haven't talked about the characters of my neighborhood and the things that – when I thought about them, I found it fun to go back and think about it. We had a character named Monk, and he looked as if he was a hunchback and he carried a big stick and wore four or five layers of clothes. And he'd holler at the cars when they want by. But the children had a fairytale about him that he had a treasure and it was buried somewhere in Memphis, that he was really very rich.

We had a beautiful name – member of our neighborhood who walked his dog every day, maybe three or four times a day because
[0:29:00] he was retired. If UT won a football game or a basketball game, he had an orange coverall that he would wear. He changed his clothes three times a day. If it was hot, he'd have a hat with a little

windmill on the top. We'd watch for him and he knew everything that was going on.

When he turned 80, we had a birthday party for him. Not a surprise party, but so he could include some of his friends. And when he went out of the house to walk the dog, every front yard had a balloon and "Happy birthday, Howard," sign, which he was not ready for. He knew about the party, but not the decorations. And those were the kind of things that held our street together.

Mackenzie: Do you still feel that Evergreen still retains that atmosphere?

Dixie: My block does.

Mackenzie: Which block is that?

Dixie:
[0:30:00] That's the block directly north of Poplar. And if somebody has a loss, we're there. Now, I only know one way to minister, and that's through food. *(Laughing)* But, hey, it's necessary.

Mackenzie: Do you feel that this kind of culture of sharing can still be found throughout Evergreen? Or is it specific to regions in the neighborhood?

Dixie: I can't speak for other regions. They – yes, I think the exposure I've seen and things like the garden club, which is beyond my block of course, they're caring. They minister to their neighbors. So it's not just my block.

Mackenzie: Do you have any questions?

Courtney: No.

Dixie:
[0:31:00] I have to tell you about one of my neighbors, Stan Johnson, and he would entertain the children on a hot summer evening by showing movies of the Three Stooges and W. C. Fields out in the yard for them to cool off and be entertained. And those – I want to be sure to speak of those nice things. Willy, who is the gardener for the ladies next door, professed to be the uncle of Isaac Hays, and he was a dear, sweet person, which you can tell I really loved him.

And we had Williamson Park, and at that time, they had park supervisors or young college children, one male and one female, to oversee the activities of Williamson Park, and it was very, very nice.

Mackenzie: Would you describe Evergreen as a diverse community today?

Dixie: Oh, yes. Very definitely.

Mackenzie: How is it diverse?

[0:32:00]

Dixie: Well, culturally. Intellectually. Yes, they've brought their inheritance into the neighborhoods. Yes, we've very rich in different – the differences.

Mackenzie: If you could go back in time, is there any piece of advice that you would give yourself looking back on your experiences?

Dixie: Oh, my. Tolerance, maybe. Maybe. That's not just for African Americans, but just life in general.

Mackenzie: What is your proudest moment if you have one or a really salient moment in your time in Memphis?

[0:33:00]

Dixie: Oh, my. I can't – I don't think I can say. It may be right now boasting about my neighborhood. I've had many high points, which my daughter pointed out to me, and when I said, "Yes, I have." At the millennium, I had my whole family at midnight in my house. And then I saw – I was present at the birth of one of my grandchildren.

Courtney: I had a question, this is kind of going back, but I remember earlier you mentioning your Girl Scout troop.

Dixie: Yes.

Courtney: And could you tell us a little bit more about your Girl Scout troop? The dynamics of it?

Dixie: I was a Girl Scout for 24 years, and I had an integrated group. They met at Trinity Methodist Church, and we had activities.

[0:34:00] And one day we had a party at my house, and I didn't know that I bothered anybody. But my immediate neighbor telephoned her friend who we had in common, and said, "Did you realize that she was entertaining African Americans?" And when she repeated it to me, she asked for forgiveness for being – for tattling that – but it made me aware that there were those who didn't see the world as I did. Yes. It was a Girl Scout troop, not Brownies.

Courtney: So these were older girls?

Dixie: Yes. Fifth – fourth, fifth, and sixth graders.

Mackenzie: Do you have anything else you'd like to share with us?

Dixie: I had a troop at St. Patrick's. Now, that was a proud moment. St.
[0:35:00] Patrick's church is down on Linden and it's not integrated. It's all African American, but Marita Pinkle, whose husband was a physician and chief at St. Jude's at the time, and I had a Girl Scout – now these were Brownie Scouts, and we didn't have cake and cookies at the breaks. We would have peach halves or boiled eggs. Something nourishing. And you had to lecture to them that everyone gets one, and you don't take from the other one. The hand is not quicker than the eye, we hope.

We taught – one little girl came in with a coat wide open and it didn't have any buttons. And at that meeting, we were teaching them how to sew on buttons, and that child left with a warm winter coat. Yes.

[0:36:00]
Mackenzie: All right. Is there anything else that we haven't discussed? Anything you'd like to ask us? Anything that we've –

Dixie: Yes. How are you going to use this?

Mackenzie: This is going to be for the Crossroads to Freedom digital archive.

Dixie: An archive?

Mackenzie: We have ___ ____ interviews.

Dixie: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. I made some quick notes. I'm going to see if I've left something out that I really wanted to – oh, we have parties in our neighborhood. If you have two parties on the same celebration, then you're expected to continue it. And we have one for the New Years Day, not New Year's night, Valentines, 17th of March, and I was the first one on the street to decorate the house at Halloween. And I even had a spot light on Dracula on the roof of
[0:37:00] the porch. Now, this was the makings of one of my daughters, who is a stem-winder, too. And let me see, Christmas open house, there's one lady who has an open house on Christmas day starting about 4:00 in the afternoon. Children and adults of course are invited. Punch and wine is served.

The straight line wind and the ice storm, you'd better believe that that brought us together. I can – the ice of course made it look like

a fairyland, and one of the men was walking across the stone wall with a candelabra all lit, and I thought, "This is a Kodak moment."

Mackenzie: What year was the ice storm?

Dixie: I'm not sure. I'm not sure. But we all gathered at one house
[0:38:00] because she must have had electricity. No, I don't think so. We just brought candles. But everybody brought – I was going to have Thank God It's Friday that night, and I was on the phone canceling it when this neighbor said, "You can have it at my house," and we did. And it was a moment and a night that we all remembered. Yep.

Mackenzie: All right. Well if you have – unless you have anything else to add, we would like to thank you, Mrs. Brown, for taking your time to speak to us about your experiences –

Dixie: It was my pleasure.

Mackenzie: Thank you so much.

[End of Audio]