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Hibbert: Hello, my name is Caroline Hibbert.

Henry: And my name is Allison Henry.

Hibbert: And on behalf of Crossroads to Freedom and the Center for Transforming Communities, we'd like to thank you for sharing your story with us today.

Griggs: Okay.

Hibbert: Could you state your name for us?

Griggs: My name is Karen Griggs, but everybody calls me Tony. That's my nickname.

Hibbert: And when and where were you born?

Griggs: I was born in Saint Francis Hospital in Memphis in Shelby County. And I was born September the 1st 1943.

Hibbert: And were you raised in Memphis?

Griggs: Well, in the county all around Memphis. We lived in Frazier and Rowley and then we came in and moved into town.

Hibbert: When was that?

Griggs: Let's see – I went to Treadwell in the 10th, 11th and 12th grade so that was probably – graduated in '61; it would probably be about –

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'59, I guess.

Hibbert: So, you didn't come in to Treadwell until high school.

Griggs: Right.

Hibbert: So, what was your home life like growing up? What did your parents do?

Griggs: Well, my father and my grandfather before him supplied all the meat to the Overton Park Zoo. So, if you really want to know the truth of the matter, they butchered four mules or horses every week

and took them to the Overton Park Meat House and that's what my daddy did for a living. I wasn't around any that part of it but I was glad. But we had to live in the county because they took care of that business in the county and of course, they couldn't live in the city then and things changed when my father died.

Hibbert: All right. Did you have brothers and sisters?

Griggs: Yes. I have three sisters and a brother.

Hibbert: Okay. And so what was coming into Treadwell like in the 10th grade?

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Because some of the other Griggs's we've had have just described how close everyone was at the time and how it was kind of a big family. So, what was it like coming in and kind of trying to get into that whole sense of community and unity?

Griggs: Okay. Well, I just came out of Bartlett and I'd been in Bartlett in the ninth grade so I was a little fearful when I came to Treadwell. It was huge. A lot of seniors and juniors and sophomores were there. It was a big school. It was a little frightening at first, but then I made a lot of friends and was happy after I got settled.

Hibbert: How big would you say?

Griggs: I think there was over 400 seniors in our graduating class. It was huge. Treadwell was a big school and I still – there's many, many people I never met that were graduated with me because they weren't in that group or they weren't in our homeroom –

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or in our classes.

Hibbert: Right. Did you do extracurriculars in high school?

Griggs: Not particularly. Mm-mm. I was part of the GED class that went out and worked. I got to work through that at Lowenstein's East Department Store. I did that and worked.

Hibbert: Could you elaborate on how that program worked a little bit?

Griggs: Oh, it was great. You joined that particular group or that class and you'd go on job interviews and we were hired all over Memphis. Kids were hired and we'd work there our whole year and of course, we got salary and everything so, it was good.

Henry: What type of work did you do?

Griggs: I worked in what they called at Lowenstein's East, the mixing bowl, which was ladies' apparel and I was a sales' clerk. I helped people find the clothes they in and –

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that they liked and I'd wait on them – you know, take things back, bring things to them – and I even got good enough they let me handle the cash register some. So, it was fun.

Henry: What did you do after high school?

Griggs: Oh my goodness – what didn't I do after high school? I worked for the Crossbar Ranch and that was a horse ranch. And then I worked for Miss **Hugh Franc** Smith in Germantown with horses so I kind of was in with the horse business for a while. Then I went to General Electric and I worked in a factory that made lamp – tail light lamps – and I was an inspector. So, I had a lot of different jobs but 1963, I got married and at that time, I went and started working for Nationwide Insurance. So, I had a lot of different jobs.

Hibbert: And did you keep living in the Highland Heights community –

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during this time?

Griggs: Yes. Yes. We were. We lived on Towns for a while and then when I got married, we moved into Bannockburn. That was in Frazier. And then we came into Memphis in 1964 and bought our house on Vernon Avenue and I've been there ever since.

Hibbert: And is that in Highland Heights or –

Griggs: Well, it's over here closer to Kingsbury. That little part of Vernon's 3980 Vernon so it's closer to Kingsbury, that little section. Close to Steverson's Grocery Store.

Griggs: Okay. So, could you maybe describe – I know there are a lot of ways it's changed, but some of the ways that have stood out to you the most that have changed about the community from when you got here when you were young?

Griggs: Right. Well, we didn't consider any danger going anywhere in Memphis. I could go –

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walk anywhere I wanted to. A lot of times, I walked to school. When we lived on Towns, I'd walk to school rather than ride the streetcar. We had tokens – we could ride the city bus but a lot of times, when it was pretty, I'd rather walk and there was no danger. No – you didn't hear about people shooting people.

And I know maybe it happened somewhere but the house wasn't locked at night when we'd go to bed. We didn't have to worry about locking doors or windows. There were no police in our school. We didn't ever have policemen. We were so scared of our principal, Mister Mayberry, that we weren't about to misbehave.

And it was a whole different world. I wish you kids could experience that world because it was a lot safer. Things have really changed and it's sad. I never heard of killings in schools. We never heard of such a thing.

And my heart goes out to the kids now because –

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of the things they have to fear that we didn't have to think about. Never entered our mind. The biggest thing I was scared of at school was I didn't want to cross the teacher because I sure didn't want to go to Mister Mayberry.

Hibbert: Could you tell us a little bit about him? We read that he had been at the school for 30 years when he retired in '69, I think it was.

Griggs: Well, everybody held him in high esteem, even the kids. Even though we were fearful of him, we liked him. He demanded respect. He was a nice man and all the kids respected him. And I think that's something that's lacking in our schools today.

I don't see that respect that kids had. They weren't perfect then, they aren't perfect now but the respect is lost and it's sad to see that lost.

Hibbert: What about parent involvement at the time? A lot of people are saying parents used to be very involved.

Griggs: Right. Well, the schools were in a community.

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And so it was easy to know what was going on in your community and parents were more involved.

Hibbert: How so, like?

Griggs: PTA meetings. They had large groups at PTA meetings and they supported the school.

Hibbert: What about like, sports events, stuff like that?

Griggs: Well, we loved our basketball team. In fact, that year, my senior year, we went to state and I got to go with them to Knoxville, Tennessee. Oh, that was so much fun. And we had our pep rallies. I guess y'all still have pep rallies, don't ya?

Do you kids still have those? We had more fun. We had our mottos and we'd cheer and just have the best time. Our basketball team was so good and we really got excited over our basketball team.

Henry: What were you favorite pastimes while you were at Treadwell?

Griggs: Well, just hanging out with the kids when I got a chance to.

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Of course, I was – I loved the horseback riding. I was into that and it was kind of separate from school. But I guess my fondest memories is we get out of a Friday night and we'd run down to McDonalds and we got – let's see, we got our hamburger at McDonald's and we got our french fries at the Krystal. Or vice versa – I can't remember which one was which. But one had good french fries and that way we could see who all was in their eating.

We'd drive through and check it out, try to find our friends. Kinda the same way you all do now.

Hibbert: So, you had mentioned earlier that your mother also went to Treadwell.

Griggs: Yes. She didn't have the privilege of graduating because of – the great depression had made it impossible for the family to buy the books and the clothes they needed for the older children so the younger ones got to continue at Treadwell but she had to drop out 'cause she was one of the older kids. And I don't –

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know what year she dropped out but she went to Treadwell.

Hibbert: Just switching gears a little bit. We were wondering if you had any memories of – that stood out of, I guess, you were working in stores downtown in the area in the '60s. Do you remember anything about maybe segregation or the sanitation strike and how that affected your work experience?

Griggs: Oh, that didn't happen until after I was married.

Hibbert: Oh, and your so you stopped –

Griggs: In high school was finished and it started shortly after that, I guess, that it started getting wild in Memphis. It was a real scary time for everybody.

Hibbert: How was it scary?

Griggs: Well, there was riots. Martin Luther King was killed. I know I remember when all that happened, my husband was a hunter, so a lot of people came to our place because we had guns. We didn't know what was gonna happen.

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Memphis was really wild about that time and we were scared. And I now the black community was scared, too. It was a frightful time. We didn't know what was gonna happen.

Hibbert: How – I guess, how were you affected kind of personally by the assassination? Were you – or even the curfew from the sanitation

strike – just everything that was going on at the time – were you living in the suburbs then or were you living in the city?

Griggs: Well, I was married at that time and I'm thinking we were renting one of our first places we lived in and that was in Scenic Hills on Bannockburn. And like everyone else, we were saddened by it. We were scared for what would happen next to our city because it was pretty wild.

Hibbert: Could you tell us a little bit about your recent high school reunion?

Griggs: Oh, it was very nice. It was very nice. We went to our 50th –

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high school reunion and got to see a lot of people that we had known years ago and some of them were smart enough to give us a name tag with our picture from our yearbook and not our present day picture because I promise you, I could not recognize a lot of folks. I'm sure they couldn't recognize me. A lot of change in that amount of time.

Henry: Where was it hosted?

Griggs: It was – oh, me. It's at a country club. They have a golf course, too and I can't remember the name of the place. But anyhow, it's down south. But it was a very nice place.

Hibbert: So, getting together, you said you created a Power Point or DVD. Who set that all up?

Griggs: Wayne Woods, I believe, and probably another fella and right now, I can't give you –

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his name 'cause it's gone for right now. But they set that up.

Hibbert: So, did you just kind of reminisce on how school has changed –

Griggs: Right.

Hibbert: Obviously talked about your lives and everything about over the last 50 years but did anything stand out about how people were talking about how the school has changed, I guess?

Griggs: I don't know it was so much about the changes as they were just reminiscing about the old times of fun here and fun there we had and how things went then.

Hibbert: Were there any like, stories that someone told that really like, stood out to you, I guess?

Griggs: Not really. Not really.

Hibbert: Yeah, sometimes there's that one like, really outrageous story from high school that somebody will tell. So, how are you kind of involve in the Highland Heights community now?

Griggs: Okay. Well, I work with children a lot at our church at Leawood Baptist Church and help with the teen kids there. And it's a Wednesday night program –

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it's a lot of fun and we usually have maybe 50 to 60 children on a Wednesday night come in and we work with the children also on vacation bible school. And –

Looney: How old did you say they were?

Griggs: The children that we work with? Well, the most age group that I'm with is from kindergarten through sixth grade. So, that's usually the age group I'm with.

Looney: And do they all attend the church?

Griggs: Not all of them. They come for teen kid a lot of times even though they don't come on Sunday morning.

Looney: How does this program reach out to these children or their parents, at least, to get them to come out to these type of activities?

Griggs: Well, in our gymnasium at Leawood Baptist Church, we now have what they call as MAM. It's Memphis Athletic Ministries and the children go there after school and they are tutored and they play games.

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A lot of sweet people in there playing with them. And after their program's over, the parents pick them up after work. But they

found out about us having the program on Wednesday nights so a lot of children just come on over, stay for the teen kid program and join us there. And so it's helped us and it's helped the church and it's helping the children. That's the main thing.

They have a good time and they learn a lot of Bible stories and good things about Jesus and we've had a lot of kids saved because of the program.

Hibbert: What kind of kids do you think like, you serve? Like, is it mostly kids whose parents maybe aren't home when they get home and they need kind of a safe place to go?

Griggs: Right. Right.

Hibbert: So, what do you like about working with these kids in that age group?

Griggs: Well, I just love to see children that are interested in learning and knowing more.

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I love the fact that some of them are saved and get to know Jesus as their Lord and savior and that changes a life in way that nothing else can. And hoping that they'll all become good citizens as they get older. But so many of the children that come to us have not had the parents' help that I had when I was young. And a lot of them are walking. Some of them walk even as much as two miles to get to come to the programs because they want to be there.

And plus, we do give pretty good food. We like to feed everybody when they come. Usually, we get something good to eat, have some fun.

Hibbert: Would you have any, I guess, advice for these kids and kids in the community now?

Griggs: Oh, I do. I do. Respect authority. Learn to love your neighbors.

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Take time to know your neighbors and don't be afraid to reach out to others. That would be the main advice. And respect authority – whoever's over you. Somebody's gonna be over you all your life. You'll have somebody over you.

And ultimately, God's over us but then, we're gonna have bosses over us, we're gonna have parents' over us – respect that authority and learn from it. And the only time you wouldn't want to respect authority – if they tell you to do something that goes against what God tells you to do. If it's against what God says, don't respect that authority. But if it isn't against him, then you go for it.

You respect your elders. Respect the people that are over you. And I still have – I'm still under people and will be all my life that I have to show respect to. And therefore, you learn a lot that way, too.

Hibbert: Was there anything else you wanted to share about your time –

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at Treadwell or just in the community in general before we wrap up?

Griggs: Well, I want to challenge the kids in Memphis because I see that they're putting Memphis down as a whole. And I want these kids in Memphis to be challenged because they're not dumb. They're smart. They may not have had the training that they needed, but these kids are smart. And I want to challenge them to show off their best ability at school, to try their hardest – to come on and bring respect back into school and show everybody that Memphis has some smart kids.

And that we are gonna learn and we're gonna up there with the top and they're gonna be wishing they were in Memphis schools when it's over because these kids can do it and I know you can. So, that's what I want to share. Hm-hmm.

Hibbert: Well, thank you so –

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much for coming and sharing your story. We really –

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