

Neighborhood Histories: Interview with Cora Hughes]

[You can use Cora: Cedric: \$ * to indicate speakers, then add their names in later]

[Please add timecodes every minute]

Cedric: = Cedric: Kimble

Cora: = Cora Hughes

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Cedric: Good Afternoon my name is Cedric: and today I would like to thank you for coming out and giving me your time to interview you and today we will basically be discussing you know the tale of two cities you know the difference between Tipton vile and Ridgeley but first I want to start off with some basic questions you know to get you kinda comfortable with the interview so if you don't mind will you please state your name.

Cora: My name is Cora Hughes

Cedric: Alright glad to have you here today Miss Cora and if you don't mind would you please tell us where you were born and raised

Cora: I was born and raised in Trenton Tennessee which is in Gipson County

Cedric: Okay and what was it like growing up in Trenton Tennessee?

Cora: well it was a pleasant experience because I lived in intergractional community our neighbors cross the street which was good friends uh was of other color and I had great experiences; I had to walk to school which was approximately maybe four or five miles when around... Ya know going and coming and what we didn't know what is was for school to be out for snow and rain. There was no bussing in that time. So I feel like that my uh younger age was a... was a great experience which made me uh to grow to love people because that's what we uh... were around and we were taught to have respect and show respect.

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Cedric: Right... You said that um.. Growing up you walked to school and you mentioned um...snow, were there ever times you know there were bad weather going on those days some days and ya'll had to well you had to walk to school in it and if so can you kinda explain.

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Cora: At that time weather had to be really severe *[laughs slightly]* I mean severe. Otherwise let me think of a...uh... of course... If we were at school and uh a thunder storm came up we were there until it uh blew over *[loud undetermined noises]* it blew over! And uh if the snow was real deep uh we didn't walk there might have been neighbor provision of sorts like uh somebody down the street or around the corner had a car would come round and pick you up but uh I just really can't recall school ever being out until cotton picking and *[chuckles slightly]* cotton chopping time came.

Cedric: Okay so um.. when you moved from Trenton did you moved to Tipton vile or Ridgeley?

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Cora: No when we moved from Trenton we went to Detroit Michigan and it was right at the end of their riot in Detroit Michigan and when we got there things were just torn up but it was a different experience because I had a southern accent what they called the southern drawl. And it was some time getting use to communicating with the northerns ya know because I was from the South. But it was an experience that was acceptable.

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I mean they didn't look at me as being different and I had to... I had an opportunity to have friends with the other race like Italians and Mexicans and Germans and ya know we all have different characters and different backgrounds *[thunder booms in background]* so um I learned a lot from them and they made me the person that I grew up to be even when I came back ya know to the South.

Cedric: Okay so when you can back or um.. Around what time did you move back was like as an adult or was it still as a teenager- *[gets cut off by Cora]*

Cora: I was a teenager

Cedric: Okay

Cora: When we moved back from Detroit it was in 1949 and uh I was a teenager and of course I had to..

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uh my parents had to make provision for me to go to High school either in Dyersburg or McKenzie. And the reason I went to McKenzie was because they had a dormitory so they were prepared to receive students that had moved to high school that couldn't go to maybe to Dyersburg or high schools in surrounding areas because there weren't may uh.. Afro-American high schools. SO we Chose McKenzie and that's where I two years at McKenzie

Cedric: And after your two years at McKenzie where did you go?

Cora: When I graduated...Graduated from McKenzie I went to Lane College which was in Jackson

[Slight laughter]

Cedric: And um what did you major in at Lane

Cora: Okay my major was health in PE, my minor was science that would be in the biology area or *[pauses]* I didn't have a double minor I just had... Ya know a majored- *[corrects herself]*...minored in science...

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Cedric: Okay so after college and attending Lane what made you decide to come back to lake county because you know we were told, that you... you know you came and you became a teacher and you taught here so can you kinda elaborate on that?

Cora: Okay the reason I majored in the subjects I did is because I wanted to be a teacher and my theory is that if I can help someone then my living will not be in vain. So I wanted to be a teacher okay.. my parents.. [brief pause] my grandparents were in lake county and of course my parents were.

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So you have to be careful that people say what you pray for so all the four years I was at Lane I always asked the Lord to send me somewhere that I could be of help and.. uh.. That he answered that prayer so after my graduation I came back home which was Tiptonville and there was an opening at the high school, at Lincoln high school for a fifth grade teacher, remind you now I was qualified for high school not elementary never taught never taken a uh um.. any courses in elementary education so when I got back in uh that Monday morning the superintendent who was a Mister Jack Buller called our house and told me that uh they were gonna move the teacher,

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from Moore to the high school and was going to send me to Moore to teach first through fifth grade of course that didn't set well with my mother so after meditation and thought it came in my spirit to say now this is the answer to your prayer so I went to Moore and I stayed there eight years and then our school burned n then they transferred me to Lincoln High school. I became.. [Brief pause] I went back to school to become certified as a librarian and that's what I did until I retired and then when integration came about they moved me from Lincoln to Lake County High school.

Cedric:Okay so you said um.. you began teaching in Morn and then after Morn burned down they sent you to Lincoln which was an all-black high school.

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and then after Lincoln you moved to lake county high school. So how was that moving from an all-black to now you have this school mixed with both white and black so how did they take you?

Cora: Well moving from all black school to a predominate white school and the transition between desegregation and integration as I told you, you remember now when we moved to Detroit I had the opportunity to learn to live with the various other nationalities which were a great barren on me which made me be able to look at people not the color of their skin.

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But their character, their personality so the transition between the two schools were easy for me, I don't think it was easy for students that I came in contact because they expected me to have a different personality and I realize that ya know that people are just people. It's not by color so uh my theory was to treat them as their individual not compared to another individual and so it was... wasn't a great burden or... I can't think of a better word at this time *[brief laughter]* but it didn't bother me.

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It only bothered me when I saw other people didn't accept other people as they were. Not by color ya know it bothered me for a long time ya know that African Americans would come into the library and they'd all sit on one side of the room or if whites came in they'd sit on the other side of the room. That bothered me ya know, why can't you sit together? It bothered me when they had class election. The first

two years I went to Lake County High school it really, really bothered me but then after that, it began to change. Students began to change, students supported each other ya know because of their friendship and their care that they had for each other. So, that made a change.. If someone was running for class office and they thought that person would be a good person, they didn't look at the color of the skin they would elect that person.

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Ya know and I think our football team and our basketball teams had a great part in pulling people together and having good relationships with one another.

Cedric: Okay so going back to you first being a teacher at Lincoln and then transitioning to Lake County High School did you ever witness any rivalry between students and Ridgeley [brief pause] Well correct me if I'm wrong Lincoln was in Ridgeley right?

Cora: *[can't understand interviewer]* Hm?

Cedric: Was Lincoln in Ridgeley?

Cora: No Lincoln was at... Lake County in Tiptonville, over you knows over where I live where head start is and the board of education? That was Lincoln.

Cedric: Okay so were you ever familiar with the High School in Ridgeley?

Cora: Well see Ridgeley didn't have a high school,

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Ridgeley went like from first grade to...*[pauses]* I'm thinking sixth or seventh grade then they came to Lincoln but during the total segregation when Ridgeley kids would come to Lincoln, they were-... they were just kids coming. The kids in Tiptonville didn't look down to say, "Oh these are Ridgeley kids" they all... well mostly all of them knew each other before even getting there, you know parents knew parents, families knew families and ya know that kind of thing... So there was no great division there.

Cedric: Okay so would you say there wasn't a rivalry between the Ridgeley students and the Tiptonville students?

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Cora: Not on the black side now, but see Ridgeley always had a high school... They always had a high school... We always had to ya know to come.. They had to come to Tiptonville

Cedric: Okay so I was told, because we interview so many people, and we asked them about did they feel any separation between Ridgeley and Tiptonville, and one thing we got was there was a situation where they wanted the high school that's here now to be in Ridgeley or Wynnburg it's one of the two cities and with it being in Tiptonville we were told that it caused a little trouble so or a little conflict,

disagreement so could you speak on that?

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Cora: Well... [Brief pause] yes, that the conflict started I guess between people of... [Brief pause] not black people... I guess the conflict started with our brothers and sisters of color but when the old Tiptonville High school and they wanted to build just one high school and do away with the old Ridgeley High school everybody wanted to hold on to their almatater I guess you could say but I just feel that we live to make things better not for ourselves but for those that's coming on behind us.

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That we pave the way for them that we make it better for them so that they have some foundation for them so that they have something to build on and then those that come after them can build along that foundation but if ya just keep- [cuts herself off] if ya never have a foundation for anything you don't have anything to build on so if you don't have anything to build on you're not going to go anywhere so anything that's divided will fall, there is no progress in division and life is not about division, life is about coming together for the common cause of whatever the issue is at that time and the issue is always to make things better so I don't understand why we hold onto that ya know... [brief pause] Hold onto that idea or that concept,

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because we are never going to progress and if I don't progress those coming behind me will not progress where there's no progress there's stalemate and then where there's stalemate there's nothing going on.

Cedric: Okay um one question I do have, do you in your own opinion see a separation between Tiptonville and Ridgeley?

Cora: Since... [short laughter] Since I... Yes you asked me do I see a separation between Ridgeley and Tiptonville. Yes because only because some committees I've been able to be involved with and if the idea comes up somebody will always say well we have to be careful.

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We don't wanna make anybody in Ridgeley mad now we don't want to make anyone in Tiptonville mad. That's the way I see it, that division, now I don't ... I don't know whether or not that people are deep in their hearts still holding onto now we need a new high school, grant you, can we put it in Wynnburg? Now that's... you have to ask a lot of questions what's best for the kids we are trying to educate not send through school on a assembly line. To educate their minds, to develop being into what their potentials really are. What difference does it make if it's in Linville?

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It's not where the school needs to be. The main point is the school needs to be where we can truly

finance it and put into that what meets the need of our children that's gonna attend so whether it be Ridgeley whether it be Tiptonville, whether it be in Wynnburg, what does it matter but what is the most feasible place for what we need We don't need two we can barely support for one so we don't need two were not that large but until we become one were not going to be a great one because we won't have people to come in and want to come in and want to be in our environment.

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Now we are sitting on a goldmine with the real foot lake. It could have been in Gatlinburg but because of the division I feel the lake has not been developed so what does it matter who has the foresight or insight to make something that can give people not only livelihood but economical support.

Cedric: Okay do you think that putting a high school in Wynnburg will be a good solution to bring Tiptonville and Ridgeley closer?

Cora: Do I think putting a high school in Wynnburg will make Tiptonville and Ridgeley closer? My truly and honest opinion is

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until you confess, until you repent, of your separation ideas, you could have one in the sky. You'll always have division. Division is because I want my way it's, not my way. It's not Burger King, I can't have it my way, it's what's better for my brother or my sister or what's better for those who come after me. It's what we have to realize in our lives and separation is not good nowhere. Together we stand divided we fall.

Cedric: Okay well Ms. Cora I don't have any more questions

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for you today, but before we go is there anything you feel you need to say or that you feel is important that people should hear?

Cora: I feel that God has blessed us with this program team for success, this is program that they can't change the minds of young people to give them an opportunity to let them see there's another side of the corn and that you don't have to leave Tiptonville to be a newspaper man or a camera man or to be whatever and we can have the best education system in the world when we learn to be honest, fair, loving, caring and compassionate one for another and

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I thank God for this program cause this is a start.

Cedric: Okay well once again I truly thank you for that and giving me your time, got you out here in this rain, *[laughter]* but we greatly appreciate you and like I said we thank you for coming and you know

giving us your opinion and thank you.