

Interview of Mrs. Hattie Tuggle. Interviewed by Francesca Davis and Janeese Richey of the Crossroads to Freedom Project, Rhodes College.

Mrs. Hattie Tuggle, now retired, has vivid memories of her life growing up in segregated Memphis. During her childhood, Mrs. Tuggle was a member of the Girls Scouts which was segregated as well. Despite the fact that many obstacles were ingrained in the fabric of our society, Mrs. Tuggle was very involved in various activities such as the Melrose High School Choir, the softball team, and Mt. Pisgah C.M.E. Church. She contributed to the push for civil rights financially and with her encouraging spirit.

This interview was conducted in 2007 to be included in the Rhodes College Crossroads to Freedom Digital Archive Project.

The transcripts represent what was said in the interview to the best of our ability. It is possible that some words, particularly names, have been misspelled. We have made no attempt to correct mistakes in grammar.

*Francesca Davis:* – here at Rhodes College. We would again like to thank you for coming in and taking time out of your schedule to interview with us, so thank you, and we're just gonna begin by stating – if you could state your name and your current occupation.

*Hattie Tuggle:* My name is Hattie Tuggle and I'm a retiree but I do take private piano students and voice students. I retired from music in the public school.

*Francesca Davis:* And where were you born and raised?

*Hattie Tuggle:* I was born in Memphis, Tennessee, raised in Memphis, Tennessee, in the Orange Mound community.

*Francesca Davis:* And could you describe your neighborhood a little bit for us?

*Hattie Tuggle:* Yes. Now I said Orange Mound community. I also was raised in the Magnolia community. Now my childhood, it was – during that time, it was really village raising children because everybody told you what to do.

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*Hattie Tuggle:* They reprimanded you and they reported to your parents if they thought you were inappropriate in any way and your parents received it positively. They were glad and you – and any other things that when we were raised up.

Well, I participated in Girl Scouting and, of course, that was sorta like a community club because the adults in the community participated. They came over and did crafts with us and carried us hiking and made sure that hiking was enjoyable. They brought refreshments, and we did camping and the parents went with us, so it was sort of a community involvement.

*Francesca Davis:* Okay. You mentioned your parents earlier. Could you state their names and what they did for a living?

[00:02:00]

*Hattie Tuggle:* Yes. My mother was **Fronie Green**. Now earlier, she was a maid at the **Starrett** Building and then she went into nursing private patients. My father was a plasterer. His name was **Lonnie Britnam** and he was a plasterer. Now back then plastering was different from now.

They used to use lather. They call it lathers. They were strips of wood and they put stucco on the wood and then they did the finish of a smooth, creamy substance, so you had – there were three stages of plastering then.

*Francesca Davis:* Okay. Did you grow up with any brothers and sisters in your home?

*Hattie Tuggle:* Yes. I had one brother and one sister and they're both deceased.

[00:03:00]

*Francesca Davis:* Okay and they all grew up in the same household as you.

*Hattie Tuggle:* Yes, all of us grew up together.

*Francesca Davis:* Okay. Could you talk about what schools you went to growing up near Memphis?

*Hattie Tuggle:* Yeah. My elementary years were at Magnolia. I went to Magnolia from the first through the fifth grade. Then we moved to Orange Mound community and I went to Orange Mound, Melrose in the 6th grade and I was at Melrose from the 6th grade through the 12th.

*Francesca Davis:* Okay. And did you like school growing up?

*Hattie Tuggle:* Loved it.

*Francesca Davis:* Did you have any role models around this time, like your teachers or your parents?

*Hattie Tuggle:* Yes, I did. I had about – there were two that stand out in my mind. One was my home economics teacher and she used to encourage my singing. She would have a lot of teas. Back then the activity were teasing in different ones' homes.

[00:04:04]

*Hattie Tuggle:* And my other role model was my English teacher and she also accompanied the high school choir and my English teacher got my scholarship to college. She wrote the college. I didn't even have to go to a interview.

Her word was that powerful and I received a full scholarship through my English teacher's recommendation and she still lives. She celebrated her 90th birthday in January.

*Francesca Davis:* Wow. That's pretty amazing.

*Hattie Tuggle:* And she has moved here from Washington. She was a principal in Washington but she has come here. Naturally, she isn't as healthy as she used to be and after her health became ill, she came to Memphis.

00:05:00:00 BEGIN CLIP 2

*Francesca Davis:* Okay. You mentioned singing a lot. Was that really important to you in school and in your household?

*Hattie Tuggle:* Oh, yes. My next door neighbor gave me piano lessons, Martha Flowers, and the teacher who recommended me for scholarship lived down the street from me.

I took ———voice from Madam Florence McCleaf who was a renowned opera singer. She sang with the Metropolitan Opera. She also taught voice at Fisk University and she taught private lessons here in Memphis and I sang a lot during my early childhood.

I found out I could sing in Girl Scouting. We had tryouts for the Girl Scout choir and I was able to get the solo from trying out and that's when I found out I could sing 'cause they said, "Oh, she can sing," and I believed it.

[00:06:00]

*Hattie Tuggle:* I sang all during high school in programs. My mother would put me on program. People would call and say, "Can Hattie sing?" She'd say, "Oh, yes." I'd be on programs I didn't know it until Sunday and Ma would say, "You singing at that tea," downtown or wherever, and I would go and fortunately that was my ticket to college.

*Francesca Davis:* Okay. What other activities were you involved in in school?

*Hattie Tuggle:* Well, I mentioned scouting, okay. I played softball on the softball team and I thought I was pretty good. I could make some bases and I made some homeruns, too.

*Francesca Davis:* Okay. Growing up, did religion play a big part of your life?

*Hattie Tuggle:* Oh, yes. I was a member of a Christian Methodist Episcopal church and we would go to seminars or camps at Lane College.

[00:07:00]

*Hattie Tuggle:* That's our sister – that's one of our colleges. That's a CME college and we would have workshops and spend sometime weeks or two weeks in the summertime there and, well, there were a lot of activities at church because you didn't have community centers and we had our parties and they would let us dance a little bit, not like they dance now.

Our dances was kinda exercise and we had – oh, an outstanding entertainment was the heaven and hell party. Now a heaven and hell party was – the heaven was ice cream and the hell was hot spaghetti, but that was very popular. We would have those at a different member's home and we would have it at church.

[00:08:00]

*Hattie Tuggle:* And our church was really popular because there were a lot of girls at our church and a lot of handsome boys, so whenever we had a activity, oh, we had a lot of kids there.

*Francesca Davis:* Okay. What was the name of your church?

*Hattie Tuggle:* Mount Pisgah CME Church. I was christened there and I'm still there.

*Francesca Davis:* Okay. Let's see. You mentioned that your high school English teacher wrote you a scholarship letter for the college. Could you talk a little bit more about what college you went to?

*Hattie Tuggle:* I went to Kentucky State University and, of course, I'm a Thoroughbred and I am – I have – I just paid my lifetime alumni dues.

*Francesca Davis:* Okay and what activities were you involved in?

*Hattie Tuggle:* In college?

*Francesca Davis:* Yes.

[00:08:59]

*Hattie Tuggle:* Very busy Alpha Kappa Alpha woman. I was a Basileus, so I was very busy and I was the president of the senior ballroom, so that kept me very busy. I was a librarian for the choir and I'm trying – oh, the Pan-Hellenic Council and a member of the choir which kept us traveling a lot.

**Commented [RC1]:** In the terminology of Alpha Kappa Alpha, a Basileus is the president of the sorority. (Source: Wikipedia)

So I guess we had a funeral four 'cause all the dignitarians or the people in the city passed, there were four of us who always sang at the funeral or at the – you know, the graveside service, whatever that was.

00:09:46:00 BEGIN CLIP 3

*Francesca Davis:* Did you have any significant experiences at Kentucky State?

*Hattie Tuggle:* Yeah. The first time – the one that stands out in my mind most was *Tall Kentuckian*. That was a play that was a story of Lincoln, Abraham Lincoln.

[00:10:03]

*Hattie Tuggle:* And I was – I'm trying to think. I was Mrs. Lincoln's maid and I really can't think, but I think I was Lizzie Keckley. Whatever Mrs. Lincoln's maid – whoever she was, that's who I was and it was at a theater in Louisville, Kentucky and, of course, it was quite controversial because it was the first time blacks went to this theater.

And, of course, Kentucky State came down by the buses because I wasn't the only one in the play. There were about ten of us because there were some in the chorus. They had a chorus, too, and it was quite an experience.

We practiced about three weeks. We were there six weeks. We practiced, learned our part, for three weeks and they paid us.

[00:11:02]

*Hattie Tuggle:* That was a big deal, and then the performance lasted three weeks. The buses stopped running about 2:00 in the morning and we would get around – we had a roommate. The college secured a home for us.

They thought it was a reputable couple and there weren't any cabs running that time of morning so, as I think about it, I guess the people were hospitable, but they didn't carry us to our residence.

They put us out about – oh, about five or six miles from home and my roommate and I, we would walk home 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning and I decided show business wasn't for me and we practiced so hard I had sinus.

[00:12:02]

*Hattie Tuggle:* ~~I had sinus.~~ I didn't know the cause of it, but I guess the atmosphere and hard work or whatever it was, so – but it was quite an experience. I'll always remember it.

*Francesca Davis:* Wow. Do you have any significant memories or experiences growing up here in Memphis?

*Hattie Tuggle:* Oh, boy, growing up in Memphis. So many things happened in Memphis – experiences. Well, I remember going through a lot of things. We have – Memphis has had – has gone through so many changes.

And when I came up in Memphis, I guess it wasn't far from slavery because we were called everything but we weren't insulted by it because our parents told us we know – you know who you are.

[00:13:02]

*Hattie Tuggle:* We were called the N word quite frequently and – but we knew – it didn't rub us too much, you know. It just ran off our back like a duck and, of course, the schools were segregated.

When I went to college, I remember my music teacher. He was from Massachusetts and he said something I'll always remember. He says, you know, "Being from Memphis, you know it's segregated."

Oh, they had white signs and colored signs. We drank out of the fountains for colored and then they had the white fountains and you couldn't drink out of the white fountains.

And he said, you know, "It's better – I would rather live in Memphis because it's spelled out black and white. You know segregation." He says, "But in Massachusetts, it's – you know, it's camouflaged."

[00:14:00]

*Hattie Tuggle:* He said, "We are treated, you know, black, get back, but there are no signs." He said, "That's the reason I'm here in Kentucky, is because they wouldn't hire brother and sister in the city school system, so my sister got the job."

And he said, "I came to Kentucky and that's why I'm here." His name was Harry Baker, a renowned and profound organist.

*Francesca Davis:* Wow.

*Hattie Tuggle:* So we were glad he had to come to Kentucky State to teach us.

00:14:35:00 BEGIN CLIP 4

*Janeese Richey:* Okay, let's talk about what your life was like during the 1950s through the 1970s. Can you tell us where you were living during that time?

*Hattie Tuggle:* Well, now 1950 through '54, I was in Kentucky, at Kentucky State University. Then I got hired – I graduated in '54 and then I got hired with the Memphis City Schools.

[00:15:00]

*Hattie Tuggle:* And so I taught – my first school was at Larose Elementary. I taught the sixth grade. Then I moved to – then I was transferred to Lincoln Elementary and that's when I went into my field, my area of concentration, which is music and I've taught music ever since.

*Janeese Richey:* Okay. What do you like really remember about this period?

*Hattie Tuggle:* About the period of –

*Janeese Richey:* 1950s.

*Hattie Tuggle:* – '50 through –?

*Janeese Richey:* '70s.

*Hattie Tuggle:* Through '70s. Well, there were – that's when integration started, about the latter part of – about the latter part of '50 and '60 and then a whole lot of changes were made. We used to – I don't know why this comes to me so vividly now but we used to go to the – we had special days that we went to public facilities.

[00:16:05]

*Hattie Tuggle:* We went to the zoo, I think, on Tuesdays, and if the Fourth of July or holiday came on that Tuesday, then they changed our day to another day, so you can see how strong segregation was, and we went to the fairground once a year to the fair and that was in the fall and that was the only time we went to the fair.

We didn't go all during the year like you have had the opportunity to go, and integration started, I think, about the '60s and that's when things began to change where we could go to the library. We had the colored library. It was the Cossitt, I think, Library on Vance Avenue. I think it's still there.

[00:17:01]

*Hattie Tuggle:* It's named from a lady who was very diligent in the fighting for integration but I cannot think of her name right now.

*Janeese Richey:* When did you first start getting awareness of the Civil Rights Movement?

*Hattie Tuggle:* When it started – when it began, because all of the churches – you see, the Civil Rights Movement was begun in Memphis with



college students. Students from Le Moyne and University of Memphis started integration here in Memphis.

And they would get arrested and we would take collection in church on Sundays to get them out of jail and to pay for lawyers, so my involvement and awareness was to pay my money.

[00:18:02]

*Hattie Tuggle:* Adults my age did not participate. It was really the youth who integrated and sat in downtown restaurants and got arrested and that was the – everybody was aware then.

*Janeese Richey:* Were there any events in particular, any other events that really stand out in your memory the most about the Civil Rights Movement?

*Hattie Tuggle:* Yeah. Now not necessarily Memphis, right? Are you speaking of Memphis?

*Janeese Richey:* Memphis.

*Hattie Tuggle:* Memphis, okay. I just mentioned about how the youth were arrested and the way it was done, I'll always remember it. Some of them were snatched from stools downtown at restaurants.

[00:19:00]

*Hattie Tuggle:* And I remember, I think it was the nine that integrated the University of Memphis, and young people were very strong and followed role models and it was ~~non-violent~~ ——— and that's what I remember most about it. It was very organized.

*Janeese Richey:* Were there people in your life who helped to shape your thinking about the Civil Rights Movement?

*Hattie Tuggle:* Oh, yes. Now locally, it was the NAACP, of course, Maxine Smith. She deserves all the accolades she gets. She was the secretary but she directed most of the activities.

*Hattie Tuggle:* And, of course, the lawyers were – H. T. Lockard and A. W. Willis and Sugarmon. I can't think of his first name, but those were the three outstanding lawyers that represented the students who were jailed or whatever.

00:20:19:00 BEGIN CLIP 5

*Janeese Richey:* What impact did all these experience from the movement have on you and your family?

*Hattie Tuggle:* The impact of me and then my family? Well, we were supportive, encouraging, 'cause there were some youth at my church who were involved in it, and we just encouraged them to continue to be strong and, of course, I think a lot of strength came from the encouragement and blacks were in agreeance of it.

[00:21:01]

*Hattie Tuggle:* About in the '60s, I recall, we had Black Monday and that meant that you wouldn't shop downtown and then it spreaded to we stopped buying downtown and, of course, it was strength to the integration movement and the good part for me was I paid out my department store bills, so that was great for me.

*Janeese Richey:* What did you learn from these experiences that you had during the movement?

*Hattie Tuggle:* During the movement? I learned that there is really strength in unity.

[00:22:00]

*Hattie Tuggle:* When we are banded together, there's strength and my mother taught me – it comes to me – that there were three of us and she always encouraged, "Stick together, children, because –." And here's her parable: "You can break one stick easily but if you three sticks band together, they can't break you easily." So we always stuck together.

*Janeese Richey:* Do you feel that these experiences changed you in any way?

*Hattie Tuggle:* Yes, I'm sure, because this was all instilled in my growing up and maturing and it always sticks in my mind you should cooperate, how important cooperation is.

[00:23:03]

*Hattie Tuggle:* It helps you to cooperate with others and, of course, it helps you if others cooperate with you.

*Francesca Davis:* Well, do you think – you mentioned a great deal of change that was going on in the city. Do you think compared to what things were like then – do you feel like they've changed today or has there been a great deal of change compared to today in Memphis?

*Hattie Tuggle:* All right, today, and are you speaking of Memphis? You know, when you say Memphis and the changes?

*Francesca Davis:* Yes, ma'am.

*Hattie Tuggle:* The greatest change is you had a stronger home life. You had parents then who were in control. There was no – there wasn't much questioning.

[00:24:00]

*Hattie Tuggle:* Whatever they said for you to do, it was, "Yes, ma'am" or "No, ma'am." And the change now is there isn't – there is very little or no parenting and that's the problem. It's poor home life, no parents or weak parents, and that's the greatest change that stands out in my mind.

00:24:34:00 BEGIN CLIP 6

*Francesca Davis:* What do you feel is the greatest lesson that we can take from people like you and Maxine Smith, Dr. King, who banded together during the Civil Rights Movement? What message do you think would be good for people from our generation to take from that?

*Hattie Tuggle:* Your generation.

[00:24:58]

*Hattie Tuggle:* There again, you've got to – well, obedience is one of the things that that generation or our generation had. We were obedient and your generation lacks obedience.

There are a lot of codes or we had – well, it was later, I think, of Martin Luther King legacy of nonviolence and that is what Maxine and that group who started integration, were fighting for integration, and, of course, we can't leave out Martin Luther King because he was the main person.

[00:26:00]

*Hattie Tuggle:* And I could mention him because he came to Memphis to help with integration. -There again, they were models because they advocated nonviolence and there I think of appearance of your era.

The dress code, the way we – the way you dress implies so very much. It speaks that we're not properly dressed. They don't dress properly for occasions. I guess saying your not properly dressed covers it.

[00:27:00]

*Hattie Tuggle:* Being courteous and there again for your generation I always think of the song, No Man is an Island. No man stands alone. We have to work together and learn to cooperate.

*Francesca Davis:* You mentioned Dr. King's visit to Memphis. What impact did that have on you and your family and maybe the people at your church or people who you were around?

*Hattie Tuggle:* On me, I think the first time – the impact, great. We admired him and we followed his teaching. I remember the first time I heard him speak was at Mount Olive CME Church and you know how it is when you have these big shows, how the stars are last. Everybody comes in and performing.

[00:28:00]

*Hattie Tuggle:* We got there, I guess, around 7:00, 8:00 to hear Martin Luther King and there was a line of speakers before him and I think he came on stage about 11:00, but we were sitting patiently waiting to hear this dynamic speaker.

There is no speaker like him. His voice, everything, demands your attention and respect and, of course, what he says is just profound.

*Francesca Davis:* Well, again, we want to say thank you for coming in to share your wonderful and amazing story with us. It's been a great pleasure.

*Janeese Richey:* Thank you.

*Hattie Tuggle:* Thank you. The pleasure's mine. \_\_\_\_\_.

00:28:48:24 END OF VIDEO

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Male: Wow.

Hattie Tuggle: Yeah.

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