

*Holly:* Well, on behalf of Crossroads to Freedom Project we'd like to thank you for coming in and sharing your stories with us.

*Christine Gale:* You're very welcome.

*John:* Can you please state your name?

*Christine Gale:* My name is Christine Gale. I'm from New Athens, Illinois.

*John:* Could you describe where you were born and raised?

*Christine Gale:* I was born in San Antonio, Texas. And I grew up in Marmaduke, Arkansas, Greene County, northeast Arkansas, about 45 minutes from here. I grew up there on a cotton farm with my grandparents.

*John:* And what is your occupation now?

*Christine Gale:* I'm a homemaker. I stay home with the girls.

*John:* And who were your parents?

*Christine Gale:* My parents were Yvonne Ledbetter and my dad was Jerry Don Ivy.

*John:* And your parent's occupation?

*Christine Gale:* My mom was a homemaker back then and my dad was a Staff Sergeant in the Air Force.

*John:* And how  
[01:00] did their jobs affect you growing up?

*Christine Gale:* Well, I only lived with them till I was about two. And then I went to grandma and grandpa's house. And grandpa had, he was a sharecropper on a small, you know had a few hundred acres, planted cotton and stuff. And that's where I was raised and worked on the farm and grew up around a cotton farm.

*John:* Did you have any brothers or sisters?

*Christine Gale:* No, I was an only child.

*John:* Could you describe what it was like growing up as an only child?

*Christine Gale:* We lived way out in the middle of nowhere. I was the only kid for miles. And so, I had my little dog and stayed busy playing with him and would go out in the fields with grandma and grandpa when I was real little, was when they still handpicked a lot of the cotton or grandpa did at that time. And  
[02:00] rode on tractors. And you know or just played in the yard, while- just with a stick or whatever, whatever kept you busy, kept you occupied.

*Holly:* So, were there otherwere \_\_\_\_\_ family members around the house other than your grandmother and grandfather?

*Christine Gale:* No. It was just them. Their kids had all moved off, got married, and started their own families. And a lot of weekends we would have, which would be my aunts and uncles would maybe come down Saturday or come down Sunday for dinner or we might go visit some of the elderly relatives which would have been like my great-great aunts and uncles. But other than that, there was no family around.

*John:* So how would you describe your home life?

*Christine Gale:* It was just very rural. It was just I guess what you'd consider just typical small town. You know back in '60s, '70s.  
[03:00] It was a small area. The school that I went to had a couple hundred kids. The little town now, as of current date has about 1,200 people that live there. So, it was a real, real rural area.

*John:* What kind of activities were you involved in growing up?

*Christine Gale:* Church and 4H, and you know they had girls' softball which I didn't play, but that was about it, sports and if you did church and 4H was what you had to pick from.

*John:* Where was it that you went to school?

*Christine Gale:* It was a little school called Marmaduke Elementary and High School.

*John:* And how was school for you? How did you feel about it growing up?

*Christine Gale:* I liked it. And it was always fun. I always liked my teachers. We had about 12, 14 kids in the class.  
[04:00] Even when I graduated in 1982, there were like, I think 32 kids, you know the entire senior class. But it was fun. It was you knew

your teachers, and you started kindergarten or well, first grade. They didn't have kindergarten back then. But, you went to school with the same people all the way through. But it was nice.

*John:* How did religion play into --

*Christine Gale:* It was you know you went to church on Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night, very strict Southern Baptist. Grandma, which you know she had grown up in Depression times, you didn't say bad words. Grandpa got yelled at if he said four letter words. No drinking, no smoking, you don't work on Sunday. Grandpa wasn't, no matter how far he was behind, you did not go in the fields, or you did not do any work on Sundays, other than grandma cooking.

*John:* And Growing up who were your role models --

*Christine Gale:* I guess grandma. You know she was real sweet. She was a nice person, nice to everybody. I had an aunt that lived up around St. Louis that, Uncle Zane and Aunt Jerri-Gerri when they would come to visit she seemed real exotic because they lived in St. Louis and she took classes and she had a job and worked and drove a car. At our house, grandma she was a woman, she didn't drive. So Aunt Jerri-Gerri would be my other one because that just seemed so, she just seemed so really cool when I was little. And they got me my first dog, so that put them right up there too.

*John:* Do you feel like your aunt a large impact on you growing up?

*Christine Gale:* Yeah, quite a bit, quite a bit.  
[06:00] Grandma had the most. She stayed home, taught me, she was the one that would read stories, take care of you when something was wrong, taught me to read, to count. And after getting uprooted with divorce and everything, it was, grandma was the greatest thing ever. The whole time I was growing up she did all the class parties and bakedeked the cookies and just seemed ideal, just the perfect grandma, mom.

*Holly:* So you said you lived on a farm, did that affect your school? Did you work at the farm after school when you started school or did that end whenever you started to...\_\_\_\_\_?

*Christine Gale:* Yeah, well grandpa since he was older when I went to live, he had cut back some. And didn't do as many acres and which he sharecropped, so that kind of I think probably affected the structure somewhat. But when I was, I can remember

being three, four when grandma and them were picking to keep me busy I would follow them because I can, ~~whenever~~remember -back then the cotton was a lot taller before they started coming out with the hybrids. So, finding a big plant ~~or~~for a big huckaburr sitting under it for shade, you'll sit and play in the dirt till grandma made the round and come back. When I was little, it was to keep me in the backyard or keep me occupied and out of trouble. I would pick the ends where the, once grandpa had a tractor and they'd turn, you know the picker ~~and~~ would turn around we'd, the little kids would always pick the ends just busy work. I probably, from the time I was eight or nine tromped cotton, which when they would dump it into the wagons, we would walk around jump up and down on top of it to pack it down, get more loaded in the wagon. But, you know we didn't miss school. According to farm season, but even little you helped. I started riding the sprayer at 11 or 12, getting paid to spray the chemicals on the weeds and stuff, so yeah, it affected, growing up on a farm it affected a lot of your, what you did in your spare time, your fun time.

[08:00]

Holly:

So you said that they sharecropped, how was the structure set up for that?

Christine Gale:

There was a gentleman, Bill Block that owned the ground. And grandpa would farm X-number of acres that he ~~c~~would handle. He didn't ever really have people working for him. He would turn over, he got to keep a certain percentage. ~~T~~the person owned ~~the~~land I think probably took probably about 20% of the profit. They didn't pay for the expenses, but they got just profit right off the top. And grandma and grandpa got, it was a four-room house that they got for free to take care of it. Keep the ground up and then once grandpa retired and we lived next to, there was a huge barn with other farmers' equipment that had taken over from grandpa, grandma and grandpa got a free house to live in for quite a few years just to keep an eye on things and help change the oil or whatever grandpa could putter around and do. Part of the deal was you take care of this and we give you a house to live in. So, they didn't have to try to make rent or anything like that. But grandpa covered all the expenses, seed, chemicals all that come out of his end of the money.

[09:00]

Holly:

So were you the only ones working~~ing~~ed on the farm and other people come in and help --

[10:00]

Christine Gale:

I can remember being probably about three, maybe four. It would have been the late '60s when I first went to my grandparents. Grandpa was the only one that, he took care of everything, grandma

helped. We would, he would have workers come in. ~~T~~, and there would be just like you would see in a picture in a book there would be like a flatbed or what we called a "bob truck" come through. There would be seasonal, Black workers, ~~there~~ would be seasonal workers, that would come to work on the farms. Pull up, you know can you use any help? And grandpa would let them know if he was, which he always needed help at picking time. And they would help pick. And that was all the help he would do is to get the crop in at the end of the year. But ~~hey~~ people would just come in

[11:00] in the back of a truck saying, how many acres you got? How many people do you need? Do you want us to stay and help? And I have no idea. I think they paid by the pound, per pound picked, where you were paid so much. And grandpa and them they would work out however that worked. But, I can remember being little and people pulling up and wanting to try to find work, going from farm to farm to try to find work, steady work in the fields.

Holly: So is this common practice ~~—————~~North east Arkansas at the time?

Christine Gale: Yeah. I do know that around us, a lot of the neighbors, were people coming through to pick and stuff were not nice. You know, this is late '60s. They were hateful and mean people. I can remember

[12:00] people would be leery because I mean we were way out in the boonies. I mean there's wasn't anybody around except maybe a few other farmers. You know coming up and stuff and neighbors would holler or chase them off and things. And so it wasn't a great climate at the time. But, grandpa ~~was~~, what he thought was if you come and showed up for work, and you worked hard and that's all he cared about was nice people ~~who to~~ helped him get his cotton in.

Holly: So do you think it's your grandparents' perspective on the situation that influenced your ~~response~~ ~~—————~~thoughts on the Civil Rights Movement today?

Christine Gale: Yeah. Grandma especially, grandma was the one that you know in a sweet way that little grandma's do  
[13:00] she made sure that you behaved yourself. You did this, you did that, you didn't do certain things. And grandma wouldn't, she would always go out of her way to be nice to everybody because to be hateful or rude or to say nasty things or racial slurs or any kind of slur on anybody was just not right. It was just rude. And that was the worst thing you could do was be rude to anybody. So,

grandma growing up she would, ~~people in~~ later on in the years and stuff, it might be trucks with Mexicans coming to work. And whoever, it was we'd leery, ~~I know~~ the old man I know down the road from us was a horrible, horrible person. And you know they would be a little nervous because they didn't know who this was, that they were going to be working for, some dumb redneck or who.

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And grandma would make sure that she was out there with a pitcher of tea and "y'all come up and sit under the Sycamore tree with us, it's shady." And ice water and you need anything, you know come up because that was just the nice, that was the nice thing to do. So seeing grandma do that and hearing her, doesn't matter who you are, it matter~~ss~~ what type of person you are, had I mean the biggest influence on me because of the, the county was all White. To this day, the school that I went to is all White. And if the county, I'm pretty sure the county is, Supreme County is still pretty much White, if it's not completely White. It's even today is like that, and for grandma to be who she was

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was quite extraordinary. You know for her to be that forward thinking for someone who would be like 95 now, and to teach it to her kids and whoop it into them if necessary with the boys when they were older, when the older ones were at home. But you know she was more concerned if you were a nice person, if you had good manners and soap, and if you were a Democrat, that was grandma's big concern in life.

Holly:

So, what were your first experiences witnessing acts of prejudice?

Christine Gale:

With I can, as far as, I can remember being, which in second grade I had spent with my dad. And you know he was in the Air Force. We'd went to Texas. I think we were in Alabama. We were in Florida, we went to Germany. The first time I remember thinking that you know some people do things that not everybody agrees with, we had to draw a picture of Easter you know for school it was ~~school.~~ ~~They~~ had religion in the classroom then and our teacher wanted us to draw something that meant Easter, crosses and Easter lilies. And this was third grade and I had drew a picture and she had kept me after school and wanted to talk to me about it because it had been, she's like well what is this? I said well when I was with daddy I saw that. That's Easter. And it was, they had been burning crosses on a hill. And she's like well, where was that. And I was like we just saw it. And I didn't think anything of it until because my dad died a few years later. I have no idea what it was, you know if it was something involving him or

[17:00] what, but her making an issue of keeping me after school and driving me home herself and asking questions, you started to kind of say, well why was she interested?

[18:00] And then starting high school in seventh grade, other schools coming in to play basketball, Marmaduke was huge into basketball. And there would be a lot of slurs and comments hollered out at other teams and players coming out of the locker rooms. You know the guy, a lot of the guys thought that was funny. Hell, they were the big stuff and just thinking well, why because, why would you do that? Because grandma was, it's just not nice being rude or hateful or, the big thing was to never hurt anyone's feelings, ever. And that just seemed so out of character of what was taught, what I grew up with. So, those are the, me witnessing things probably would have been about, I guess about '75, '76 and just the guys and in the bleachers hollering at ball teams coming in ~~thee~~ basketball games. And then teachers, principals, coaches not getting after them, not telling them don't do that bad sportsmanship or anything. It just all kind of slid by, as "boys will be boys." And that continued on through the, I know I graduated in '82 and it was still all, that's just how it is with some of the people there.

[19:00] Just good old rednecks --

Holly: So, looking back on that today, would you say that your views on this subject are different from your peers ~~fromin~~ that era and like region--

Christine Gale: Yeah. Class reunions, things when I'd go back to hometown around people that I grew up with that I like them. I've known them since I was a kid. They're not someone that in my life now, I would choose to be around. I mean, just so narrow-minded, so it's just not somebody that I have anything in common with. Some of them are still women should be home barefoot and pregnant, and you know just so stuck back decades ago. Its like can't even carry on a conversation with them. So, considering I grew up in that town and school and the system like that, you know I'm quite proud of grandma. She did, accomplished a lot raising five kids of her own and then me and I don't think there's a racist, prejudiced one in the bunch. They're all open-minded. Grandma stayed open-minded about everything. I think I have a much broader opinion and less judgmental on all kinds of issues because of the way grandma raised me.

I know a few years back, she found out

[21:00] my one cousin, grandma was 89 at the time, found out my one cousin was lesbian. And Cindy had been terrified to call grandma and tell her that she's married to someone named Susan. Grandma was upset that the laws would not allow them to get married because they're living together. They're living in sin. They should change those laws because those girls need to get married. And that's at almost 90 years old ~~she-~~ it didn't occur to her to go along with probably most of the other 90-year old Southern Baptist women around her that that was not okay. She wouldn't judge anybody, other than if you were a good person, and polite and that was her criteria.

John: What do you think influenced your grandmother's civil-mindedness?

[22:00]

Christine Gale: I know when she was a little girl her mother had been, had both feet crippled up real bad. And had probably, went through terrible things because both of her feet turned backwards. So, I'm sure back in late 1800's, when she was younger that she was discriminated against and probably was a little more tolerant because of what she had went through. Grandma's dad was part Indian. And they lived ~~near-~~ right next to a reservation in Oklahoma. And I know her little best friend growing up was Cherokee and lived on the reservation and they did go to school together. So I think maybe things she saw when she was little with the way maybe things at the reservation, things like that. But you know never asked her point blank. She was just, that's just always how grandma was and by the time we come to realize how special that was, she had passed away. So, we didn't get to ~~siet~~ and ask her specific questions. But she had, her uncle, some of them were terrible, terrible people that did terrible things you know back during the Depression years. So, I don't know if it's something she saw because she was the only one that was, you know her mom and dad ~~there-;~~ maybe near the reservation things along that line, either that or she was just ~~an-~~extraordinary, just for her own reasons. I wish I was able to ask her now, find out the stories that made her that sweet and that open-minded in the era that she grew up in.

[24:00]

Holly: So is there anything else like you'd like to add or share with us about your experience with the Civil Rights Movement?

Christine Gale: No, that's, ~~you know~~ the main stories. And I know a lot of times people think Civil Rights okay you know the '60s. You think of

the main things, but a lot of the things that were wrong especially in rural areas of the south, it wasn't just then, it's 1982, and it was still the same. You know some things now it's smaller areas you don't, people think it doesn't happen now, so they don't worry about it. But we had taken a train to Arizona in just this past November. Got to talking, ~~and~~-I smoke, so you know get off and smoke

[25:00]

breaks and stuff, a young lady from Jonesboro, that had been to ~~Parigold~~Paragould, probably, maybe two years, three years ago and Green County, ~~Parigoagou~~Paragould a little bigger than Marmaduke. She's like you know that's a strange place. I don't, it's just people that are still they think okay, everybody's fixed, Civil Rights is over. And it's still the same in some ways. And people should be more aware because when they're more aware they stop and think about their own actions and things that they say or things they react to, and usually when you're more aware like grandma taught us, ~~if~~ if you're aware of what you're doing and saying to who, whatever reason, if it's someone that's gay or just whatever,

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when you're aware of your actions and your words, you choose them more carefully and you watch what you say. You're more polite, just more common courtesy to your fellow man. And people should slow down and pay attention and be more courteous and stop and talk to people, have a real conversation with people that are around you. And you know grandma had taught us that and I hope that I passed that on to my girls. That's an important lesson from grandma that I'd like to see passed down --

*Holly:*

Do you feel that, because you mentioned that it's still so in rural areas, still a problem, do you feel it's kind of peculiar that so close to Memphis, which has such a history of civil rights that that wasn't spread outward maybe to some place

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half an hour, 45 minutes away --

*Christine Gale:*

Yeah, it does. And I know that that area, it's a small town. It's one of the little small, which I live in one up near St. Louis, it's a small town to where you know somebody new moves to town, they're outsiders. Everybody stays cliquy. And I think it was a lot of that, you know just weren't as opening to, inviting to other people moving in to bring other influences and just the fact that they could just and everything just stayed the same. You know they didn't have to think about ~~it~~, they just wanted status quo, I mean in all matters. Adding new classes or ~~new~~ curriculum to the school took a long time. Just everybody gets

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got kind of set in their ways and I think since you don't have as big of an influx of people like you do in a larger town and stuff, it's just easier to let that slide through. And the status quo just stays.

And I know growing up, when I was little it, you didn't talk about it. During the Civil Rights and I know the age that I was and the years there would have been things on the news, but it wasn't discussed because if you said the wrong thing and ~~then~~ the neighbors heard you then the neighbors would take it out on grandpa or you know your equipment.

So, things just didn't get discussed, afraid of who would say what to who or who would hear what. And I think that had a lot to do with things staying like they were that close to you know Memphis and cities that were such on the forefront of Civil Rights. People too worried about who's going to hear what and saying the wrong thing.

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And maybe the neighborhood or the neighbors' not agreeing with them, and causing problems because they didn't like your opinion because it wasn't, you know grandma would talk to us about you should do this and that. But as far as my aunts and uncles coming and setting around the Sunday table and discussing things, it just, you just didn't discuss it. It just wasn't brought up. You know when you have attitudes like that it's hard to bring change or to get things changed or new ideas brought in.

Holly:

So if you'd have to give a piece of advice to our generation who didn't experience things like this, what would it be?

Christine Gale:

[30:00]

To always watch what you say and no matter who it is you're talking to, no matter what color, what country what sexual preference, or anything, always watch what you say and be nice. Never, ever say anything to ever hurt someone. You can disagree with them in a polite way to where your idea gets across and you exchange ideas. But, never, ever say or do something that would hurt someone else. And usually that kind of covers a whole gamut of problems that can come up. And when you do that you can disagree with someone in a polite way and they, people will listen to you more when you're being nice to them. And then they're more open to your ideas and it accomplishes a lot more.

Holly:

Well, again we'd like to thank you for coming in and talking with us about your experiences. Thank you so much --

Christine Gale:

Oh, you're very welcome. I enjoyed the questions and talking with yall. Thank you.

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