Ace Madjlesi: On behalf of Crossroads to Freedom, I want to thank you for taking the time to share your story with us so that we can share it with others. I'm Ace Madjlesi, a student at the University of Memphis, and today we're at Saint Patrick's Catholic Church talking with Allen Stiles. Mr. Stiles, thank you for sitting down with us today.

Allen Stiles: You're welcome.

Ace Madjlesi: To get things started, we're gonna ask some biographical questions. Could you introduce yourself and tell us your name and where you were born?

Allen Stiles: My name is Allen Stiles. I was born in Memphis, Tennessee.

Ace Madjlesi: And how long have you lived in Memphis?

Allen Stiles: I've lived in Memphis primarily all my life, from 9-28-39 to the present time.

Ace Madjlesi: What about your parents? Were they born in Memphis?

Allen Stiles: They were born in Memphis, also.

Ace Madjlesi: And what did they do for a living?

Allen Stiles: Well, my father and mother are both deceased. My father was a waiter and a bellhop; my mother was a schoolteacher.

Ace Madjlesi: Where did she teach?

Allen Stiles: She taught at Hanley –

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Elementary, as well as Melrose Elementary.

Ace Madjlesi: Let's talk a little bit about what it was like to grow up in Memphis. What neighborhood did you grow up in?

Allen Stiles: I grew up in what's called South Memphis. The neighborhood is Mississippi and Walker. I was born on a street called Ford Place, which is a block from Mississippi and Walker, and I later moved out to – in about six years, we moved to LeMoyne Gardens, and I stayed there about six years, when we moved to an area called Lauderdale Sub. Okay, so those were the primary neighborhoods that I came up in.

Ace Madjlesi: Do you have any memories from those neighborhoods that you'd like to share, or do you remember what those neighborhoods were like growing up?

Allen Stiles: Well, it was like a village. I mean everybody just about knew everybody else. We knew who –

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to play with and who not to play with, because some areas were a little rougher than others. I was fortunate enough to live across the street from the high school and elementary school I went to, as well as the college that I went to, so getting to those facilities was not difficult. I could walk or ride, either way.

Ace Madjlesi: What high school did you go to?

Allen Stiles: I went to Saint Augustine High School.

Ace Madjlesi: And what did you do after high school?

Allen Stiles: After high school, I entered LeMoyne-Owen College – it was called LeMoyne at the time – and went there four years.

Ace Madjlesi: So, you mentioned that at LeMoyne – do you remember was it at LeMoyne that you started hearing about sit-ins and the Civil Rights Movement?

Allen Stiles: Exactly. Exactly. Approximately –

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1960, the spring of 1960, at that particular time, the sit-in movement had started, and it seemed to come from the East Coast and came to the middle of the country, where there was a man by the name of Marion Barry who was mayor of Washington, D.C., who also came up in south Memphis. He attended Booker T. Washington High School, as well as LeMoyne-Owen College, and he inspired us to participate in the sit-in movement. He encouraged the students to get involved, to assume the rights that we were supposed to have. The day that he came was the same day that 40 students –

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of LeMoyne College went to the public library at a time when they were not supposed to go, and sat in. At that particular instance, we continued to sit in and, at that particular time, I worked primarily

in the background, helping to plan strategies for the movement. My mother had instructed me not to get too much involved because of the possible danger to me and maybe to the family. So, I told some of my cohorts that I would help in the background and would come forward if you needed me, and, of course, about two weeks, maybe later, they informed me that they needed me to participate. So, they –

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gave me the time and the date to integrate the Pink Palace Museum.

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Ace Madjlesi: And this was in 1960?

Allen Stiles: It was in 1960.

Ace Madjlesi: And you mentioned that, at that time, African-Americans were only allowed at these public facilities one day a week.

Allen Stiles: One day a week, that's correct. Okay, I think Tuesday was the day for the Pink Palace Museum that we were allowed to go on that day. This was a Friday. It just happened to be Good Friday, and we went straight to go to campus and be prepared to be transported to the Pink Palace Museum. I got up I guess about 6:30 that morning, prepared for school like I normally do. I didn't want to attract any undue attention, and at a certain time –

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that morning, we were instructed that we would be asked to go to the Pink Palace Museum. There were six of us: four ladies and two men. We were transported there. Before we were transported, there were people sent out as decoys. Some students left on the bus, some left in cars, and this was to draw the police in their directions, and then, after about an hour, we proceeded to be transported to the Pink Palace Museum. Upon getting there, the curator asked us did we see the sign out front, and I said, "What sign?" Really, I did not see a sign. He said, "Well, in so many words, you know what time it is," so I said, "Well, we pay taxes. I don't see any reason why we shouldn't be able to go any day we please to."

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So, I, with the other five, we proceeded to look around inside the Pink Palace Museum. The curator instructed us to remain in that area, which meant that he was gonna ask us to be prepared for being arrested. The police came, escorted us to the paddy wagon, the name they give the vehicle, which is also called a Black Maria. So, we were put in the back of the Black Maria, and we were transported to the Memphis city jail, whereupon we were booked, given a number, fingerprinted, the usual procedure for arresting people. Our group was to be the first group to spend 24 hours –

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in the jail, so we were in jail – at the time we got in jail, it wasn't but approximately one or two people in there. But, after being there for a while, it soon filled up on a Friday night. It seemed to be a black jail because I didn't see ~~no~~ white people _____. [inaudible]. Okay, and it seemed to be segregated gender-wise, as well. We were separated from the female companions we had. Okay, so after spending 24 hours there, there was a young man that was put in jail who was a classmate of mine, but from what he told me, he was put in there for clowning at a nightclub. There was also another man who was put in jail.

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He seemed to have been drunk, so they had him by his feet and by his hands, and they just one, two, heave, ho and they threw him in there on the concrete floor. Our furniture consisted of a commode with no seat, an iron bench, and a sink. By the time 30 people got in there, there may have been enough room for two people to sit. The man who was intoxicated, he ended up under the bench, which was probably the best place to be. He was out of everybody's way. Later on that evening, they brought us a meal, and the meal consisted of cabbage, fatback, which is a portion of a pig with a little lean meat in it.

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It looked like there was some rice on the plate, as well. It was bland food: cornbread, coffee with no sugar. It didn't look appetizing, so I didn't reach for it. So, one of the inmates told me, he said, "You need to go ahead and eat that because that's all you're gonna get between now and tomorrow," so I proceeded to eat it.

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Ace Madjlesi: How long were you in jail?

Allen Stiles: We spent 24 hours. We were put in there about 11:00 or 12:00 Friday, and we got out about 11:00 or 12:00 the next day, on Saturday, and since there wasn't any place just about to sleep, unless you just got down on the floor, we didn't get much sleep that night. As a matter of fact, some of the guys held on to the bars and did some exercises, you know –

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just to keep from getting stiff, I guess. Okay, so –

Ace Madjlesi: What group were you working with –

Allen Stiles: – okay, the group was known as SNCC. It was S-N-C-C, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. There were several groups around us. The NAACP seemed to have supplied the lawyers that paid our bond and got us out. I got out and, when I got home, I think my family was in a state of shock. Not that they hadn't seen me, because they saw me on the evening news, so they knew where I was. Okay, so then we had fulfilled our obligation, you might say. By me attending –

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a Catholic church, I had confided in, asked the priest what I was gonna do, and the only thing he told me was to be prepared for the consequences, which could have been anything from being killed, or spat on, anything like that, which didn't necessarily enter my mind or the others' mind. We were blessed that there was no police brutality, you know, and that was, if you can call it a good part, that was the good part. Okay, like I say, we were bailed out around 11:00 or 12:00 the next day, and went home. The next day, I went to church, Sunday mass. I was what they call an altar server, which means –

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that I assisted the priest in the service, and he was the same one who gave me the advice that he gave me, and he called me a jailbird. He said, "Hey, jailbird." But I proceeded, so I felt like I had died on Friday and rose again on Sunday.

Ace Madjlesi: Do you remember seeing any other sit-ins or demonstrations in Memphis during that time?

Allen Stiles: Well, the whole school – well, I won't say the whole school, but a majority of the students, I would say, participated in one way or another, either they transported the students, they acted as decoys, they helped strategize. It was pretty much a student movement, and it wasn't the easiest thing to do because at –

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that particular time, I was taking some of my toughest courses, like calculus, so my grades did suffer somewhat but I felt like it was worth it, and now I feel like it was worth it. Maybe at the time, I may have had a few second thoughts.

Ace Madjlesi: What did you do after you finished at LeMoyne College?

Allen Stiles: After I finished LeMoyne College, I had a teaching position in Clarksdale, Mississippi. The word was out that we were not gonna get hired in Memphis, but I had been offered a teaching position in Clarksdale before I graduated, and the people who were running the facility in Clarksdale were some of the same teachers that I had had at Saint Augustine School in Memphis.

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They were Catholic nuns, okay? So, I was on the faculty for a year and, while I was there, in Clarksdale, I had a great opportunity to meet Martin Luther King and, let's see, who else was with him? It escapes me right now. But, anyway, he came by the school and we were introduced to each other and talked briefly, but Clarksdale is a whole 'nother experience. So, it depends on how much time we have.

Ace Madjlesi: Well, I was wondering if – it seems like your Catholic faith has played a big role in your life, whether in Memphis or Clarksdale, and did you have any experiences with churches in Memphis that were involved in the Civil Rights Movement, or was the church involved with any of the politics of the civil rights?

Allen Stiles: Well,–

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right off the top of my head, I can't see any church that was directly involved at that moment. Of course, later on, in the late '60s, the Saint Patrick's church was involved, in a sense. The ministers here, some of the members here were involved in the Civil Rights Movement. Clayborn Temple, the church that's on the corner around from Saint Patrick's, was one of the meeting

places where they discussed strategies and things to do to help improve race relations for the better. So, Clayborn Temple, Saint Patrick's; I think Mount Olive Church was another one.

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Ace Madjlesi: When did you come back to Memphis from Clark –

Allen Stiles: I was there for one year, and –

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the pay was slim. I didn't have to buy any food because I ate at the church. You might say I was the only man in the convent because I ate with the nuns, okay? So, I didn't have a food bill, per se. My rent was minimal, so I didn't have any heavy expenses. I was actually able to save my small, little salary that I did get, so I was able to save. When I left Clarksdale, a cousin of mine let me know there was a job available to teach in Gary, Indiana, which is a far cry from Clarksdale.

Ace Madjlesi: Oh, yeah.

Allen Stiles: It was like a suburb of Chicago. I'm going north. You know, there was a great migration of blacks to the north.

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When I got there, I was somewhat shocked, because it wasn't the great paradise that I thought it would be.

Ace Madjlesi: Can you tell me a little bit about that? What were you expecting?

Allen Stiles: I taught at the same high school as the Jackson Five went to, the Roosevelt, but I didn't know of them then because it's like '62-'63. My students were kind of rowdy. Having thought that going up north was gonna be a paradise, like I said, I was shocked in that it might not have been as advanced as the south, and that the school was all black, which surprised me. It was one of the biggest, blackest high schools in the north, that Roosevelt High School. The faculty had started to integrate. The –

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school year wasn't successful at all for me. I ended up working in a steel mill, which is what Gary was known for. They made a crane operator out of me, with no training. As far as I know, I didn't hurt anybody, but I had to take a magnetic crane and pick up

steel, and transport it from one side of the factory to the other, and if I had released a button, it would have fallen on some people. So, I learned quickly what that button was. That worked out about half the time, and then the other half of the time I was a pipe fitter's helper. It sounds simple, but my job was to grind the steel after they had spot-welded it and weld it together. One of the things we worked on was a damn gate, which is about as big as this room, maybe –

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– and they X-rayed the steel, and if they found any potholes, they would cut it out and re-seal it, and my job was to smooth it out, okay? So, this is what I did before I left Gary. I left Gary and went into the air force.

Ace Madjlesi: Oh. When did you go into the air force?

Allen Stiles: I went into the air force, this was like about 1963, the summer of 1963, and that was another unique experience.

Ace Madjlesi: Was the air force integrated at the time?

Allen Stiles: It was supposed to be, okay? I had maybe two days to prepare to go to the base in San Antonio, and I was informed I had scored one of the highest scores that they had –

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gotten on that test that you have to take to get into the military. Well, I was shocked. It was a weird test, mostly psychological. Of course, some of you might know by now, if you're doing a psychological test, your answers, pretty much you put down what you think the people want to hear.

Ace Madjlesi: Right.

Allen Stiles: So, I had kind of espoused what they want me to say, so that's what I did. When I got to the air force, I went in as an officer. I went to officer's training school, which was an unpleasant experience because I got the impression they didn't want me there, and they made a lot of weird remarks and everything. So, I was phased out of that program, but they gave me the opportunity to get out or come in as an enlisted person, which meant I could do two years of service –

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and get credit for it. Okay, so that's what I opted to do, so I stayed in, did some basic training, some of what I already had when I was in the officer training school, so I spent a lot of time training for the military. Well, by not having any ROTC experience, I had to learn how to put my left foot in front of my right foot, which was kind of awkward. A lot of people who were already in the military, who came in with me, they already knew what to do, so I was learning a lot of the basics.

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--When I went to the regular enlistment, I felt a little bit awkward, but people looked up to me because they knew I had been to the officer training school, which meant I also had a degree and had been teaching, and so I was kind of like a unique person. So, when I went through the training, they kind of respected me, and one of the trainers –

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confided in me and told me that, "When you see me hollering and screaming at the soldiers," he didn't mean any harm, he was just trying to get them in shape. So, when he told me this, well that made it easy on me, but not so easy on the ones he didn't tell, because he would grab them and kind of blah-blah-blah. The basic training wasn't so bad, except for the officer training school. I went to a recreational facility. They would have a bus. They would take you into town in San Antonio, and that experience wasn't too bad, but when I got assigned to my base, the bus would go off the base and into town, and we went to a skating rink, and I had a white partner that was with me. He was _____. [inaudible]. He was from Philadelphia. A kind of short guy. But, anyway, –

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we went to the skating facility, and while we were waiting to get in the skating facility, the guy who was taking the tickets or the money told me I couldn't come in, and I'm looking around and saying, "Why can't I come in?" He said, "You're not a member." Well, the white guy who had came with me, he wasn't a member, either. So, he says, "C'mon, Stiles. We know what time it is," so we left. We got back to the base, and told the first sergeant, "We got a facility that's discriminating." So, he told me, he said, "Well, yeah, we've been trying to close it up for the longest and we haven't had much luck." It turned out, the guy who ran the skating

facility was also on the base. He was in the military just like I was –

Ace Madjlesi: Oh, wow.

Allen Stiles: – but he had nerve enough to discriminate and be selective as he was. So, anyway, –

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this first sergeant was telling me so you know, they've done already tried, wasn't too much they could do, so I went to the chaplain. The chaplain says, "Yeah, we've been trying to close them down, and we're working on it," and what they did was they cut off the bus route, because they depended on the military to come down on the bus and go to the facility. So, they cut that off their route, so something was done about it, okay? So, you could still see I still had a little of that fire in me, okay?

Ace Madjlesi: Right.

Allen Stiles: Okay.

Ace Madjlesi: Do you remember when you came back to the Memphis?

Allen Stiles: Yeah, when I came back to Memphis, I was kind of hardnosed. I mean –

Ace Madjlesi: Do you remember what year that was?

Allen Stiles: – 1965.

Ace Madjlesi: Okay.

Allen Stiles: Yeah. You think the people who are coming back now might be disturbed, and I hadn't even gone overseas.

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I had the option to go to Vietnam but I opted not to go, so the little disturbance I had inside of me, anger, and I hadn't even been overseas anyway. But I had that, so I can imagine how the ones who have been in combat, how they feel when they come back and maybe not have a job –

Ace Madjlesi: Right.

Allen Stiles: – or the family is broken up or something. So I'm very sensitive to that.

Ace Madjlesi: So, when you came back to Memphis, had anything changed in terms of civil rights or race relations?

Allen Stiles: When I got back, I got back in '65 – well, before I came back, I had spent a lot of time on the United States-Mexican border. I was stationed in New Mexico, and there was a city called Juarez, right across from El Paso. I had –

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some good times over there, but I'm not gonna tell the story. But I went to a city called Chihuahua, which is about 200 miles in the interior. Coming back, they had a roadblock on the Mexican side, and they went through my trunk of the car, because I was driving at the time, and I had a Valentine gift wrapped up for my girlfriend. They tore it apart. They said, "We're looking for contraband." They looked all through the car and everything, so I was kind of teed off, but I couldn't do a thing about it. So, before I got out, I had about three months to go and I was in El Paso at the bar with this friend of mine. He was from Little Rock and we were just sitting there, and this one guy came to me and he says, "You got to help me. I'm having some problems." I said, "What's the matter?"

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He said, "They impounded my car in a little town called Las Cruces," which is up the way from El Paso, and we went back to Las Cruces and got his car. We were on our way back, and it was a two-lane highway, and this car was coming toward me from one side to the other side. He'd come in front of me, he'd go on the other side. So, while I was trying to decide what to do, I couldn't stop because the guy who I had taken to the impound lot was right on my back with bright lights. I don't know whether it was because he was scared or what. I didn't wake up until the next day in the hospital, and all I could see was lights, like this. I thought I had gone through the pearly gates. I said, "Well, here I am, Lord." But that was just temporarily, so that's temporary.

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--So, I got out of the hospital. I stayed in there a –

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month, and I had to learn how to walk all over again because they told me I was broken up pretty bad. Well, in the back of my mind, I'm thinking it might have been racially motivated. At the time, I

was just concentrating on getting well. I had some of the best doctors at William Beaumont Hospital. I guess they were used to mending the soldiers when they came back, so they mended me back together. And a guy who was in the car with me was thrown out of the car. They didn't know where I was. I was up under the car, which they found out later, and they turned the car back over. They said they heard somebody moaning, and that was me. So, there's this white guy that came to the hospital, and he came to look to see how we were doing. So, he explained to me what happened because I didn't remember this. So, like I say, I mended. The surgeon said, the guy –

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and I that were in the accident were some of the most best built physical people he had run across. Well, I had played a little football. I think the other guy, he had, too, plus the basic training. I came back to Memphis. I did get some disability and some insurance, so I decided to buy a house, a car, and go to school. Not necessarily in that order, but upon purchasing the house, I remember this lady calling me up on the telephone and she said, "Allen, your note needs to be paid." I said, "Excuse me?" She said, "Allen, you need to get your payment in." I said, "You don't know me. Why are you calling me by my first name?" you know, and I hung up the phone. So, I was edgy, not like I am now, you know? You're all blessed to –

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find me in a peaceful mood, and then, of course, the way I dress, that's part of my persona, okay? But this is the way I was at the time. I was very edgy about a lot of things. That's why I say, the people coming back now, you know, you need to be real nice to them.

Ace Madjlesi: So, were you in Memphis during the sanitation workers strike?

Allen Stiles: I was here during the sanitation strike.

Ace Madjlesi: Can you tell us a little bit about if you remember anything from that period?

Allen Stiles: Well, like I say, there was some planning going on around this church, Claiborne Temple, maybe Mason Temple, and they were doing some strategizing and everything. I was watching TV when Dr. King got killed. I was here. The facility he got killed at, because it was a motel, it wasn't the best place to –

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be but he wanted to support black people in with the black business, okay? So, he got killed – I became a postman, by the way. That's what I did. I did that for 20 years. I wore a lot of hats. So, the day after he got killed, the National Guard had been called in because the people went crazy all over the United States, and they had National Guard sitting in jeeps. It looked like a war zone. Beale was just about torn up. So, by me being a postman, I'd walk down the area where I was carrying mail, and I saw the police and the National Guard on both sides of the street. So, like I said, I lived through that episode, and I –

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left out one highlight of my – after I sat in – I gotta go back to the sit-in – we went to the airport to picket John F. Kennedy because he was running for president, and so we had our picket signs, "We want our rights," and things like that. So, he was going downtown to make his campaign speech, so we went downtown, and we held our picket signs up, and the people were telling, "Get those signs down. We can't see," blah-blah-blah, so I walked up to Kennedy, shook his hand and told him, "Good luck on your run for our president." So, that was the highlight, okay?

Ace Madjlesi: Yeah.

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Allen Stiles: Okay, so –

Ace Madjlesi: Were there other political campaigns you worked on here in Memphis?

Allen Stiles: Well, I campaigned for Reverend Netters. He was running for city council. He was running against John Ford, that was an interesting race there. John Ford became councilman at that point in time, before he got into other trouble, but it was –

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a kind of a nasty race. There were slurs and things thrown [inaudible] Reverend Netters, but I supported him because I had a lot of respect for him. As a matter of fact, he did me a favor. I asked him to come to the church over here and participate in the service. Well, by him being a Baptist minister, it was gonna be unique that a Baptist minister back in the '70s would come to a Catholic church and say some words. I also invited a

gospel group at the same time to play drums and sing gospel songs, which was unique, too. So, I was breaking some ice there.

Ace Madjlesi: Which Catholic ~~church~~Church was this?

Allen Stiles: This one, Saint Patrick's.

Ace Madjlesi: Oh, Saint Patrick's. Okay, so you've been a member of Saint Patrick's for about 40 years?

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Allen Stiles: Forty-five years. I came out of Saint Augustine, but I thought Saint Patrick might need a little black flavor. So, I came in, and there were a lot of Italian people there. Have you been to Saint Patrick's Church?

Ace Madjlesi: Is that where we are now?

Allen Stiles: No, no. It has a big pipe organ in the back.

Ace Madjlesi: Oh, okay.

Allen Stiles: Okay, and that's where the choir used to sing. I joined the choir. I just put myself in the choir. They didn't ask me to join.

[Laughter]

But we were singing Latin, that's how long ago it was. Singing Latin, and later played the pipe organ. The pipe organ had not been played in the last 30 years. So, like I said, I've been here since then, and that gave the church a little flavor. But other people came, and, as I say, I invited Reverend Netters. I invited Reverend Wilder. Reverend Wilder was a dynamic preacher. He wasn't a fiery preacher, but he –

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honed in on his message, you know? So, he had also helped to funeralize an uncle of mine. My uncle was _____ _____[inaudible] right around the corner _____ _____[inaudible] Lewis. That's where my uncle was funeralized, so he did come and preach over him, and so I invited him also to come and do a service like Reverend Netters had done, and with a gospel group coming in.

Ace Madjlesi: Did you see a lot of integration happening within the church?

Allen Stiles: Saint Patrick's, of all the churches that I know of, I don't say it was the only one, was the most integrated church in the city, and might still be because, like I say, there were black people coming here because black people lived on Pontotoc Street who were coming here even before –

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I came, but I think I sped it up a little bit. So, right now, it's not as many blacks as it was at one time, but I did do some things. I sponsored talent shows. Well, about the time, I would say in the '70s, Saint Patrick's had become a utilitarian church by definition of name. They decided that they would use the church for the people, and they almost made a gymnasium out of it. They used to play volleyball in there. I started staging talent shows. For 20 years, from '71 to '91, I worked with the young people in the neighborhood having a talent show. Well, a lot of people didn't like it because they thought it was rowdy. It wasn't exactly like, what's the TV show, American Idol?

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But I think they used the same idea I had. I had three judges, and they would keep a record, and then they would select a winner. See? So, I predated them, okay?

[Laughter]

Maybe not Terry Mack, but American Idol.

Ace Madjlesi: And Saint Patrick's is still really involved in this neighborhood.

Allen Stiles: It is very much involved. I mean a lot of things. Ken Reardon?

Ace Madjlesi: Mm hmm.

Allen Stiles: Okay, he's a member but he's also active. They're doing the cucumbers, they had a garden project right here. On Sunday, we feed the homeless. Through the week, we have the food pantry. We've done a lot of things, and some things have kind of fell by the wayside. We built houses down the street. If you go down Pontotoc, you'll see some houses with green roofs on them; these are houses Saint Patrick's had built.

Ace Madjlesi: When were those built?

Allen Stiles: Late '70s, maybe early '80s, somewhere like that.

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I may be off a few years, but that's it.–

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Ace Madjlesi: Okay. Well, we have a few more minutes before you have to go, so I was wondering are there any changes in Memphis that you have hoped to see over the course of your life but haven't seen just yet?

Allen Stiles: We can go to the museum anytime we get ready. We can go to the zoo anytime we get ready. We can go to the library, any library. As a matter of fact, the library was named after a black man, Ben Hooks, okay? By the way, he was a Republican. A lot of people didn't know that, because he didn't wear his party on his sleeve. He just did what needed to be done, which is what everybody admired him for, because he was also head of NAACP, he also worked on the FCC, okay? And he also, I think, was one of the lawyers who helped get us out of jail when we went to jail.

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So, a lot of things have happened. We probably couldn't be sitting in here talking.

Ace Madjlesi: Right.

Allen Stiles: Trust me, so we're in here. We couldn't collaborate and work on pickling, and got a black deacon right here in that runs this facility. We had a revival about 25 years ago. We had a tent revival right where the FedEx forum is sitting. We had a minister from Washington, D.C. whose name was Reverend Stalling, and understand that in Washington, D.C., he had a membership of 3,000 and the people worshipped him, but he got himself in trouble because of that but he gave two dynamic revivals here at Saint Patrick's, which was kind of unheard of, okay? As a matter of fact, the bishop of Memphis at the time, they said he didn't want to be necessarily seen at the revival, but he –

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parked his car on the side of the street so he could hear the good music and everything, and the fiery talk and everything. What else was taking place? The Civil Rights museum, of course, is built over there. The baseball games, they used to have a black stadium and a white stadium in baseball. The first integrated game I saw was around 1958, something like that. Willie Mays came here

with the New York Giants, and Minnie Minoso came here with the Chicago White Sox. They had two different leagues, but it was an exhibition game, so they played here, which is two of the greatest ballplayers. Have you ever seen Willie Mays? Y'all ever see Willie Mays play?

Ace Madjlesi: I'm very –

Allen Stiles: ———.[inaudible].

Ace Madjlesi: – I'm a huge fan of Willie Mays –

Allen Stiles: Okay, he did something with a baseball that some people couldn't do with a basketball. I mean he would catch a baseball –

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looking in the opposite direction. If the ball was ——[inaudible] like a football, he'd catch it over his head, and he could bat hit and all the other things. He was a fun to watch person. But, like I say, we had separate stadiums here, and the Memphis Red Sox was a black ball team, and the Memphis Chicks was the white ballplayer team. So, we've got the Redbirds over here now, which is integrated, you know, playing downtown, so that's a big change, okay? Two black mayors, Dr. Herenton, he was in a class behind me at LeMoyne, okay? So, I knew him before he became mayor, and helped support him to become mayor, okay? A C Wharton, the present mayor, his wife and all, they go to Saint Augustine, which is a –

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black Catholic church in Memphis, so I already knew them, as well, see? What other things have transpired here? Well, just in general, like I say, like we're sitting here, the movie theaters. Stax Records was formed by a white couple, Estelle Axton, and what was the other guy's name? Steve something. Anyway, they formed the name Stax, and it became the black recording studio, although they were white. It started out being a record store. They started out selling records. It was called Satellite Records, see? The reason I know so much about it, I live a block from there. As a matter of fact, that used to be a movie theater. A movie theater seemed to be good for acoustics as far as recording goes, because Willie Mitchell had the Hi studio, which was the Royal –

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movie theater. Well, with segregation – well, I say integration killed the movies because they didn't want blacks and whites sitting together. So, just about all the movie theaters closed down all over the city. All the swimming pools just about closed down. Of course, they weren't integrated prior to King's death, and after King's death, rather than integrate, they closed them up, because you know where the Orpheum is?

Ace Madjlesi: Mm hmm.

Allen Stiles: It used to be called Malco, and blacks could go to Malco but you had to go up the side and up in the balcony, what they call the crow's nest, whatever. So, all of that has changed. Beale Street was just entertainment street for blacks coming in off the river, going up there to celebrate and –

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having a party, see? Well, you can't tell it's a black street anymore. It's gotten to be a white street, because the people liked what they saw and they wanted to be a part of it, and they kind of priced maybe some of the blacks out of going down there. But the theaters down there were all black, so we had black theaters, white theaters, and when you tried to integrated, they just closed them down and that's why a lot of them became music studios [inaudible], you know? Did that enlighten a little bit? So, swimming pools, most of the swimming pools had closed, the fairgrounds. We had one day or two days that we could go, but Liberty Land, it got to a place where you could go whenever or whatever, and of course we don't have that now.

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Ace Madjlesi: So, my final question is is there any advice or a message that you would want young Memphians to know, and if so, what –

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would you tell them?

Allen Stiles: Oh boy, you got me that time.

[Laughter]

I would tell them to do the best they can in school, and don't let anything turn them around. They might have to stumble a few times, but just keep focused. My mother used to always say, "Keep your eye on the prize," you know, that was her famous

saying. And you might run into some roadblocks, but just keep the faith and things will straighten out. I teach now. I teach at Southwest Community College.

Ace Madjlesi: Oh, okay. What do you teach over there?

Allen Stiles: I teach math. Math is my forte, okay? So, I'm an adjunct faculty member. I mean I'm part-time, like a glorified sub, I guess -

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But I take pride in teaching, and it gives me a chance to talk to the students about other things. You know, don't get too far with what they call bird walking. Have you ever heard that term bird walking?

Ace Madjlesi: No.

Allen Stiles: Well, you know, a bird, when they walk with their toes go out in different directions –

Ace Madjlesi: Oh yeah.

Allen Stiles: – so they don't want you to get off the subject. I got in a lot of trouble like that, "Stay on the subject. Talk about math only. Don't get off into politics and all that other stuff."

Ace Madjlesi: Well, thank you so much for your time, Mr. Stiles.

Allen Stiles: Okay.

Ace Madjlesi: It's been an honor to talk to you, and thank you so much for sharing your stories of Memphis with us.

Allen Stiles: Okay, you're more than welcome.

Ace Madjlesi: Thank you.

Allen Stiles: All right. Thank you all.

[End of Audio]