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Tretarius McCain: Good morning.

Vivian Walker: Good morning.

Tretarius McCain: On behalf of Crossroads to Freedom, Rhodes College and Knowledge Quest, I want to thank you for taking the time to share your story with us today. I am Tretarius McCain.

Markia Weathersby: And I am Markia Weathersby.

Tretarius McCain: And we are honored to meet you and learn from your inspirational story. Today's interview will be archived only at the Crossroads to Freedom website. Can you state some basic biographical information for the record? So what is your name?

Vivian Walker: My name is Vivian Walker.

Tretarius McCain: That's a nice name. Could – if you don't mind, could you tell us what year were you born?

Vivian Walker: I was born in 1948.

Tretarius McCain: Good year. Where were you born and raised?

Vivian Walker: I was born right here in Memphis, Tennessee -

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- at a hospital that's called John Gaston Hospital. Now I think they call it the Med, pretty much. But that's where I was born, and I was raised just a couple of streets over from Mississippi and Walker, just by the street over going north called Stevens. This is when I was born. That's where we was living on Stevens, 606 Stevens, right at the corner of Orleans.

Tretarius McCain: What is your occupation?

Vivian Walker: My occupation now, I'm a regional support specialist for Ducks Unlimited. I retired from Ducks Unlimited in '09. Took my retirement, and stayed all four years and did my, you know, little volunteering. I just decided the workforce is where I felt more comfortable and what I enjoyed more. So I called them back and asked them if I could come back to work.

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And now I work about six, seven months out of the year for Ducks Unlimited doing the same thing.

Tretarius McCain: So who are your parents?

Vivian Walker: My parents are Doris and Evan Bronner. My maiden name is Bronner.

Tretarius McCain: What were there occupations? Could you describe what they were like?

Vivian Walker: Yes, my father worked for the city of Memphis as an asphalt worker. They paved the streets with – you see the black streets, that's with tar. That's what he did. And my mother worked for a packing company. That's what she did. She worked on the line and packing meat – King Cotton products, as a matter of fact.

Tretarius McCain: Could you describe any brothers or sisters that you had?

Vivian Walker: I had two sisters and two brothers.

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I am the oldest of five children.

Tretarius McCain: Could you describe what they were like?

Vivian Walker: Yes. My brother, Evan Bronner Junior, was two years younger than I am, and he too was a product of South Memphis. As a matter of fact, he was born at home at 606 Stevens, and my sister, Dorothy Bronner, four years – we're two years apart, the three of us. And she was also born at the hospital, John Gaston. And we all grew up – she did not go to Booker T. Washington, the Booker T. Washington High School.

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My brother and sister and I did, graduated from Booker Washington. I am a 1966 graduate. My brother graduated in '69, and my sister graduated in 1969 – no, pardon me. 1970 as valedictorian of Southside, and she went on to do some work before she went to school in Massachusetts, she did some work at Rhodes College that was then Southwestern.

Tretarius McCain: Now let's talk a little bit about your experience growing up. Can you tell me about the neighborhood you grew up in?

Vivian Walker: Yes. From the time I was born I guess until I was about, oh, maybe seven, eight years old –

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-we stayed on Stevens, 606 Stevens. And we stayed in a beautiful neighborhood there on Stevens. The neighbors were all very good neighbors. A lot of them were prominent black business people here in Memphis and in the neighborhood. As a matter of fact, right across the street from us lived a doctor, Dr. Wilson. If I fell and scratched my knee or whatever, it was nothing for me to run over to Dr. Wilson's house and let them put a band-aid on it. We also lived in the neighborhood of the Davidsons. They were in the neighborhood. They owned Davidson Grill, which was downtown. I think it was on Fourth Street. They had Davidson Grills. Then we had some more people in the neighborhood, the McGhees, as a matter of fact –

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- I believe Dr. McGhee may still live over there, but there was – we had a good, good neighborhood growing up. Went to church at that time in the neighborhood, St. Matthew Baptist Church that was on Wicks. I started at the one in 641 Wicks, and then went to the one next door. They built a new one at 643 Wicks, and that building is still standing. Before we joined the Corinthian Baptist Church at Jeanette, 590 Jeanette Place.

Tretarius McCain: So what was your home life like?

Vivian Walker: Home life, we had a great home life. My mother and father were good Christian parents. They grew up in the church.

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We were – as a matter of fact, a lot of times now, they have these circle conversations, but we – my parents, when they came home from work – let me start off – in the mornings, my mother would go to work and father, and then in the evenings, we would come home. My mother – when we got home, my mother would be there. She would prepare dinner, but we did not sit down actually to have dinner until everybody was there, until my father got home from work. Let me back up a little bit.

My biological father and mother divorced when I was probably about six, seven years old, and then my stepfather came into my life, Robert Madry, which was a saint to me.

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He was just a very, very good person. I think they met – my parents met when they were at the church hat St. Matthew, and he was secretary of the church, and he was a deacon at the church, superintendent of the Sunday school. I grew up in church, and we – let me go back to - so I just wanted to insert that in there how he got in our lives. He was my stepfather. Most people didn't know he was my stepfather until my biological father died. They said, "I thought your father was already dead," because my stepfather died first. We were so close, my father – step did not exist in our household. He was our father. And we loved him as such, and he loved us as such. To the union of my stepfather, my mother, two more children, Patricia and Larry were born.

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But back to our home life, we came home from school, of course. We had our chores to do. And once dinner was prepared, we didn't just get our plate and somebody run in the bedroom, somebody else in the kitchen. We had to actually wait until my daddy got home. At that time, I think we only had one car. So my mother, we'd go pick my daddy up from work, or if he rode the bus, then we'd all sit down as a family to have dinner. And once we had dinner, everybody discussed how their day went.

You know, of course before dinner, we had prayer. Blessed the food, my daddy really believed in that. Most of the time, my father did not come to the table in a t-shirt or anything like that. My father came to the dinner table with a jacket on.

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And we had dinner together as a family. And after that, a lot of times, we had chores to wash dishes or whatever, but my father was so great, a lot of times, he let us go on and watch TV, and my dad, "I'll wash dishes for you." He was very good. But we grew up in a great home life, and I think about sometimes on Sunday when we would go to church, we'd go to church on Sundays, and when we came home from church, we'd have dinner. A lot of times, a lot of the members at the church wanted to come home

with us to have dinner. So we had dinner at church – I mean at home. And after we had dinner, a lot of times for dessert, my mother would have made a cake or she would be in there making homemade ice cream while we were in the living room. We were shelling peas and butter beans and things that my uncle and grandfather –

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- had sent us from the summer. Because we had fresh vegetables back then. So we shelled peas and butter beans and watched TV at 7:00, Ed Sullivan, 8:00, Bonanza. After that, it was time to go to bed. So we had a great life growing up. I'm going to tell you a little thing. I remember when I was at Booker Washington. We were walking home from school, and I had stopped at this little store down on ____, I could buy a pickle. We used to take a pickle and put peppermint stick in it. I took my pickle, and I had it so this young lady asked me if she could have a bite of my pickle. So I thought she was just going to break a little piece of.

She put the pickle in her mouth and bit over half of it off. I was so hurt.

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I almost started crying that she bit almost half my pickle off. And once we got grown, one of the neighbors, which is one of my classmates, she asked me if I remembered the incident. And I said, "Oh, yeah, I remember that incident." She said, "Well, she bit your pickle because she said that was her dinner, but she knew when you got home, your mama and daddy had dinner for you all to eat, but that was her dinner, your pickle," so we had a pretty good life growing up. My parents used to help in the neighborhood, help feeding people. A lot of the children in the neighborhood became members of our church because my mother was over the youth department at our church for over 40 years. And the children in the neighborhood, she'd gather them up –

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- and take them to church with us, and eventually, they'd get baptized and become members of the church. But we had a good life growing up. I just thank God for that.

Tretarius McCain: What kind of activities were you all involved in?

Vivian Walker: At school, I was involved – my mother said Booker Washington couldn't have a cat fight unless I was a part of it, so at school, I was a member of various clubs. I was in the Washingtonian staff. There were different things – I was NDCC sponsor, just several yearbook staff, just a lot of things I was a part of at Booker Washington. And then in our church, I was a member of our youth choir, and after I grew up, I was – I taught Sunday school. I was secretary of the Sunday school.

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Then once I got grown, I was secretary of Corinthian Baptist Church for a little over 31 years. So I grew up in quite a – you know, doing quite a bit.

Tretarius McCain: So can you share some of your – some of the memories from your childhood that influenced your later life?

Vivian Walker: From my childhood. When I was growing up, you know, back in the '50s and very early '60s, a lot of the students, they wanted to be like secretaries and social workers and things. So I have always enjoyed being – you know –

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-thought that being a secretary was just – that's what I wanted to do. Then in being the secretary of the Sunday school when I was young, that made me want it to kind of, I guess, pursue being what we call now an administrative assistant, per se, but then they were called just plain old secretaries. And I enjoyed doing that. In most of the jobs that I've had, it entailed doing something of that nature, whether secretary I was for a local union here and some other things. Accounting was – I did a little of that. So those things when I was growing up, those were the type of careers –

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- I kind of pursued because I enjoyed that. And then I got into, you know, when I was young, I worked downtown interacting with the public. So I found that I enjoyed doing that. So at that point, I along with being secretary, wanted to pursue something in customer service. That's kind of my pet peeve now. When I go into a place of business or something, I check out the customer service because that's one of my pet peeves, and when I was young, I enjoyed doing that. That kind of put me on the road to where I am now and what I'm doing.

Tretarius McCain: I wanted to ask you about your educational experiences now. Where did you go to elementary school?

Vivian Walker: Okay, I went to elementary school – first of all, I went to Rosebud.

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Rosebud was a private school, one of the first black private schools here in the city. And Rosebud was located right up here on Mississippi. Mississippi and Jeanette. I think there are some apartments there now, but it was Rosebud. I went to kindergarten there, and from there, I went to LaRose. I think LaRose is still in existence, but back then when I went to LaRose, it was at the corner – the first LaRose, we went to what they call – they had back then an old LaRose and a new LaRose. Old LaRose was located at the corner of Wicks and Wellington, and it was – I think it was like a three-story big white building, and there were classrooms there. There was a principal by the name of Ms. Shannon.

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She was our principal at that point at Old LaRose, and from Old LaRose, I went to New LaRose, which was the brick building that existed down at Wellington and Crumb. Those were my elementary years.

Tretarius McCain: Where did you attend middle school?

Vivian Walker: Middle school or what we called at that time junior high school was at Porter. Porter Junior High School. And I attended Porter Junior High School at that time was from seventh grade to ninth grade, and that's where I went to junior high school or middle school as you call it.

Tretarius McCain: What did you do after you left high school?

Vivian Walker: Okay, well let me insert this. I attended the Booker T. Washington High School from tenth grade to –

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- 12th grade, and I graduated in 1966 from Booker Washington High School. From there, I attended Owen Junior College. Now Owen Junior College used to sit right where Vance Middle School

is now. That was Owen Junior College. And I left school in – I left college in '67 I believe it was. I went for about a year, and then I kind of got fast and started shooting hooky with the folk that I knew I wasn't supposed to, and I ended up – I had my first son. So but Owen Junior College is where I went to school, and that was before they merged with LeMoyne, which is now LeMoyne Owen College.

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Tretarius McCain: How did immigration and segregation impact your educational experience?

Vivian Walker: Okay. I remember when I was in elementary and – I don't know if I'm understanding your question, but one thing I remember is when we were in school, our books that we got, they would be torn up and ragged. You know where your name goes in your book? There'd be a whole list of names in that book, and what had happened, we had inherited those books from some of the other schools, and then they passed them on to us from some of the other white schools. They passed them on to us.

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I just thought that was – why have we got to get something not only secondhand from them, but third, fourth, fifth. The book had gone around so many times before it got to us. At that point, I thought I don't think this is right. I think that we should be equal in so far as our education is concerned also. So when my children were born and even before then, I wanted to make sure that our schools – and I still would like for them to be on the same level. So – and that just was one of my pet peeves growing up in the Civil Rights movement that I didn't like that. And then of course, you know, sitting on the back of the bus, -

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I remember doing that also, and I think bus fare back then was like a nickel or six cents or something, but we had to sit in the back of the bus. And we did that. I remember going downtown with my mother. There were certain stores even downtown that we couldn't go to, and I thought that was – being a young child, I just really didn't understand that point. But I knew it was just a way of life is what we did, but I knew it wasn't right. So I wanted to be able to live, and I thank God that I did live where some of those

things have changed. You know? And even integration with the schools, I don't – it's just like Southside.

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Porter Junior High. Porter Junior High, a lot of students – I lived closer to I think it was called Southside at that time, but Southside was where old Lincoln Junior High used to be, but there were no black students at that school. So the children from over in that neighborhood, they had to walk over to Porter Junior High, but then they in turn built a brand new Southside High School. And when they built Southside High School, they gave our children the old Southside, which was then Lincoln Junior High School, and that's where some of the black students – so they could split up some of them from Porter to some on that end of town to go to –

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- Lincoln Junior High School, which my sister and brother went to. But when I was in middle school, I couldn't go there because it was Southside High School, which was for white folk. I had to end up going all the way to Porter because we had moved in 1959. I may be going round about, but in 1959, we moved to where our home house is now on Whitford, which is near Trigg and Mississippi. But at that point, those children, once they gave the old Southside to black folk, they could go to school over there, but prior to that, like I say, I had to go to Southside. I just didn't think that was right. But I don't know – and sometimes I think now, our neighborhood schools may have been – that was a good thing because our teachers –

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Seemed like they cared more for us, and our neighborhood, a lot of times we could ride home with our teacher because our teacher lived right around the corner from us. We didn't have bussing or anything. When we went to school, my girlfriend, her father worked at night. So in the mornings when he would get off work, he would drive us to school, and a lot of times, my parents, thank God, had given me money to ride the bus home. But I'm liking other children, I enjoyed on a beautiful day just walking back to the neighborhood, and we would walk back to school. So but the neighborhood schools, I think those are good things - that would be a good thing. And if it would be equal, you know, in neighborhood schools like it is all over.

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Tretarius McCain: What role did religion play in your life growing up?

Vivian Walker: Oh, Lord. In my household, I mean there was nothing else. You know, we – you either stayed there and went to church every Sunday, and then on Wednesday nights, we went to Bible study and choir rehearsal. But not only that – I told you about my father, my stepfather. We would have sometimes as children, we would sit around my father, and he would tell us Bible stories, and I remember that so vividly, I enjoyed that. He would tell us Bible stories, or if there was something on TV, a lot of times, the Ten Commandments would come on TV when we were young on Sunday evenings on Sunday night.

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And my dad would explain that to us. And let me tell you a little story. When you ask me how did religion play in my household, I remember one Saturday night, my mother did something that she very, very rarely let us do. She let me spend the night with one of my girlfriends that lived right up on Macklemore. And there was several of us girls that spent the night over there. And that Sunday morning, everybody was sleeping in and all. Not me. I had to get up. I thought I had gotten by until she called. I had to get up and get home and get ready for Sunday school. So there was not an option in my household so far as religion was concerned because my parents – you know, my grandfather –

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- was a Baptist preacher. My uncle was a Baptist preacher. And once I got grown, my husband was a Baptist preacher. Then I had two sons, both of them were preachers. So growing up, it influenced my life a lot, and I still try to instill that in my children growing up. Like I say, both of them ended up being ministers. I just wouldn't take anything less than. I loved being brought up. I heard somebody the other day said that their parents drug them. Where is he going with this? He said, "Yeah, they drug us to church. They drug us to Sunday school. They drug us to church. They drug us to Bible study."

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So if that's the case, my parents drug me because I enjoyed it, and I still am hooked on religion. I enjoy going to church every

Sunday. And not only that, I enjoy still reading my Bible and going to Bible study, watching TV, Joel Osteen and different ones on TV. So back to your question. Did that answer you?

Tretarius McCain: Which church did you belong to growing up?

Vivian Walker: Growing up, I remember – you know, I have a very vivid memory of my childhood. And I remember when I was probably about four or five years old, I remember my mother and I standing on a bus stop, and we went to Mount Nebo Baptist Church. But then, after that, I told you I was a member of St. Matthew Baptist Church.

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That's where I got baptized at St. Matthew when I was nine years old. And from there in 1959, I became a member of Corinthian Baptist Church where I stayed a member until I guess about eight, nine years ago when I joined church at Christ Quest Community Church. So I stayed at pretty much my childhood was at Corinthian Baptist Church where my mother was the youth advisor and over the youth department for over 40 years, Ms. Doris Madry.

Tretarius McCain: Can you describe the church that you attended as a child?

Vivian Walker: Yes, I can describe Corinthian Baptist Church was not a huge church. It was a church with about 150, 200 members if that.

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And our pastor, I remember every Sunday, Reverend WJ Smith, Willie James Smith. He would get up, and he would preach, and he just constantly instilled in us to love. Love, love, love. Three hundred sixty-five days a year, 52 Sundays a year, it was love. And our church was like a big family. As a matter of fact, I still am in contact with – I married my husband when I met him in the church. He's passed on now, but that's where I met him in the church, and my mother, we'd have a youth and young adult choir. When they had that choir, I tell you, they would go all over the city, different churches. Everybody wanted Corinthian youth and –

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- young adult choir. Their adult choir was good, but they wanted that Corinthian Junior – I think they called it Corinthian Junior Choir fire. So everybody – you know, I grew up with my mother

being over the youth department, and every year, my mother took the youth and young adult on a trip, whether it was to Six Flags or to Atlanta. We went to Orlando one year. But every year – and a lot of the children in the church, that was their vacation when my mother would – we would charter a bus and all get on the bus and go on our vacation to some theme park, or when we'd go to Atlanta, we'd go to the theme park and then do some of the other things. We had a great life growing up in that little church.

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Like I say, to this day from 1959, I am back in that same building, 590 Jeannette. That same building. That's where I attend church today from 1959, and this is 2013. Been in that one building. And so far as attending my church and my religious, we only had Reverend WJ Smith was the pastor and founder of the church when I attended. And then Reverend Charlie McBride. That's Corinthian. They moved on down to Levi. He decided that my son was going to stay there at that church, and he is now the pastor of Christ Quest Community Church there in that building.

Tretarius McCain: What did this church mean to the community?

Vivian Walker: Oh, the church and the community was –

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- a lot of people in the community were members of that church, whether they joined because they lived close to the church or they wanted to move close to the church to be close to their home church. But it meant a lot to the members there at the church. Like I said, we were just one big happy family. I just wouldn't take anything for it. Some of the children that were my children's age, they are now my still play children – my godson and goddaughters, whatever. But we had a great time at the church.

Tretarius McCain: Who were your role models?

Vivian Walker: My role models.

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I guess pretty much I can say that my parents were my role models because to me, a lot of people in the neighborhood, a lot of our church members, a lot of my schoolmates, they admired my parents. You know? And they admired my parents and our

family, and I thought – then sometimes when you're young, you think your parents when they're trying to discipline you, that you know, you got the worst parents in the world. But I found out I had the best parents in the world once I got a little older.

I think my parents, Robert and Doris Madry, were my role models. And so I tried to raise up my children –

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- in that way like we were raised up.

Tretarius McCain: Were you ever married?

Vivian Walker: I was married to Jerry Walker, and we – my husband and I stayed together. I had a wonderful husband that was a very good provider, a good husband. You know, he reminded me of my daddy, and some girls want to marry when they have good fathers a man like - I wanted to marry someone like my father that was a good Christian man that took care of family. Jerry Walker, my husband, did that. He's passed away now, but he left me where I can still say that along with the good lord, he's still taking care of me.

Tretarius McCain: What was his occupation?

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Vivian Walker: For the last 20-some years in his life, he worked at Nike. He was, I think, the second person that they hired at Nike when they came to Memphis. Prior to that, I think he worked for National Distillers, but for the last 20-some years of his life before he got sick and passed away, he worked at Nike as a shipping clerk.

Tretarius McCain: Do you have any children?

Vivian Walker: I do. I had two children, two sons, Ladrick Bronner and Marlin Foster. Ladrick is now deceased, and I now have one son, Marlin Foster.

Markia Weathersby: So what areas – well, events in the Civil Rights had effect on you and your family?

Vivian Walker: Okay, I remember –

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- let me tell you this. I remember back when Dr. Martin Luther King passed away. Let me tell you what happened to me personally that particular day at that particular time. We only had one telephone in our house. We didn't have phones like they got now in our house. So we only had one telephone, and that was in my parents' bedroom. So I was sitting there, talking on the phone, and I had my oldest son in my lap, and we were on the telephone, and all of a sudden, my telephone – I mean it just cut off. It went blank.

And I'm going like, "Hello? Hello? Hello?" There was nobody there. So I tried dialing the number back. I couldn't. I couldn't get a dial tone or anything. So –

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- a little bit – I guess about five, ten minutes later, the phone rang, and I resumed my conversation. And it wasn't five minutes later that TV came on that Dr. Martin Luther King had been shot. So they were saying back then that they had tied up some of the telephone lines. I don't know if that was true, but I do know I was on the telephone at that time, and my phone went completely blank. Then we had the curfews. He was here for the sanitation workers, and one thing that I remember about that – one of the sanitation workers, I don't know if you remember, that was crushed up in – okay. Right after that happened, his – I'm trying to remember. It was right after they moved in our neighborhood.

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It was his parents lived in our neighborhood. They lived down the street from us. And then they had the riots and all, had the burnings, different things. They were burning places down, and I was just scared. My parents had us – we had to just like stay at home, couldn't go out any place. I'm thinking to myself why the violence when it was supposed to be a nonviolent thing, but it turned into violence. That kind of bothered me with all the violence that took place, and even with the law enforcement putting – doing a lot of violence on some of the demonstrators. You know?

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So that bothered me. And I'm not a violent person. I don't like violence. From the '50s to the '60s, '70s, when a lot of that was

going on, I know a lot of it was done, and a lot of the sit ins and things like that, but the violence of it, I just didn't like – I didn't think the violence was necessary for them to do to our people. And when I say our people, I don't necessarily mean black people. I mean to all of those that were demonstrating because you've got to remember, a lot of them weren't just black people. We had Caucasians and others that were fighting with us also.

Markia Weathersby: At the moment when you heard that Dr. King was assassinated, what were the thoughts that were going through your mind?

Vivian Walker: I'm thinking, "Assassinated? Who would do that to him?"

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And just the night before, I had just heard him do this stirring, "I have a dream," speech, and he had everybody at awes. The place was packed down there, and I'm thinking, "Who would want to do that to him.?" Even though a lot of times I had heard about a lot of the violence that had taken place in so far as him getting stabbed or shot or whatever, but here in Memphis, why these people do this to him, so I was thinking to myself – and it really, really took a toll on me and so far personally because I have never been – I can't stand violence today. I can't even watch a movie that's got fighting and a lot of blood and all that. I can't take it. You know? That's just me personally. That bothered me and so far as that.

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Markia Weathersby: Looking over your entire life from early childhood up to this moment, how would you say Memphis has changed or has not changed?

Vivian Walker: Memphis has done some changes. Still got a long ways to go. Not a lot of changes that we could make that would progress this city on, but we've come a long ways from back in the Civil Rights days and in the '50s. We've come a long ways. A lot of it we still have here in Memphis and so far as – let's see, what am I trying to say? A lot of things that happened back then are happening now. It's just happening – well, negative back then that are happening now.

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They're just doing it by law, if you understand what I'm saying. They put laws on the books that still keep us back like we were in the day, I think. That's my personal opinion.

Markia Weathersby: Is there anything that you would like to change now in Memphis that you can think of?

Vivian Walker: Oh, goodness. I will tell you that I'd like to change a lot. Even to this day and yesterday at city council meeting, they're talking about laying off all these people. We started off not having a whole lot of jobs here in Memphis, and then once we get them, like I say, they're doing it now by law. People out of jobs again. You know what I'm saying? So you know, we are in some ways, I think we are regressing –

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- instead of progressing here, and I don't know if it's the leadership. Some of the leadership, yes, you know, but we are not progressing as much as we should have. Like they've done in some of the other cities. And you know, I have noticed, we're talking about Civil Rights, that a lot of the cities that have or had black leadership, those are the ones that are what they call now that are dead broke. You know? Right now, I tell you, my father growing up, he worked at the asphalt division of city of Memphis where they would go and fix holes in streets, pave streets.

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But now, you tear up your car driving up and down these Memphis city streets. But I don't – I've not even seen an asphalt truck or anybody fixing the streets or anything anymore. And a lot of those cities like Detroit, Philadelphia, all of them, they're saying that they're broke, they don't have anything now. And I guess they're trying to do Memphis the same way because of our leadership. I don't know if that's the case, or I don't know if once we change, it'll come back up or what. But to me and a lot of cases, we're regressing instead of progressing.

Markia Weathersby: Is there anything that you'd like to add that we didn't talk about?

Vivian Walker: I think you covered quite a bit here. I have enjoyed doing this, and you know, right here in South Memphis, they're doing a lot. A lot is being done here in South Memphis.

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And I'm thankful of that, and I'm not saying it because of Knowledge Quest of Christ Quest, Rhodes College, or whatever,

but there are people in place that are trying to get our neighborhood back in so far as even the balance and stuff that I hate so much, and keeping children off the street and doing things with young people. I like that, and I want to say to the young people, too, stay – you know, a lot of people are saying that education – it does, believe me. I'll be 65 years old, and it makes a difference. I wish growing up I had listened to my parents in so far – I mean I went through high school, graduated high school.

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They started me in college. Now even after I had my son, when I was at Owen, my parents wanted to send me back to school. And okay, my son was born in July. Let me start in January, and I'll go back then. Then January came. "I don't want to start in the fall. I'll go back in September." I kept putting it off. And then I got started getting jobs that were – I was making I thought making a lot of money at that time, but to this day, my education, I wish I had continued it on when my parents – now don't get me wrong. I've had jobs where I've done pretty well. I've done well. But I could have done better, but the jobs that I have had, the young people now –

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- they're not going to get the jobs that I had with a high school education or one, two years of college. You're going to have right now, I was a manager at one of the big companies here with my education. Now, they won't hire you unless you have a degree. I mean you've got to have a degree in something if it's just dog catching to get a job now. So I want to lead with them to please continue your education. You know? And I instill that in my children. I wanted them to – the mistake that I made going to school, I remember – I tell you this little story. My oldest son graduated Tennessee State University, and he was getting ready when he passed away to start on his masters.

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Then Mr. Foster, Mr. Foster had graduated high school. Both of them graduated with honors and all, but his father worked at Kimberly Clark, and Kimberly Clark was a good job here in this city then, especially for black people. And they were hiring – Kimberly Clark, their employees, they were hiring some of their children as long as they were in school. So Mr. Foster had a job all while he was from 10th, 11th, 12th grade, working at Kimberly

Clark, making good money, making that money and all. So when he graduated high school that year, he wanted to go back to Kimberly Clark because he was doing good, making good money at Kimberly Clark. But Kimberly Clark would not hire him unless he was enrolled in college or university.

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So he decides he's going to go to this junior college and enroll. I said, "No, if you're going to school –" I said – I asked him if he wanted to go to Tennessee State. "No, I want to stay here in the city." I said, "Well, you're going to LeMoyne." And he had not applied. It just so happened back then, I just made a phone call, and I talked to the people, and I talked to them, and I told them, I said, "If you could give me a letter saying that my son is a student there at LeMoyne, I want him to enroll, and I guarantee you, he will be there come September," which they did. And when my son, a few years after he graduated from LeMoyne, he told me, said, "Mama, I wouldn't give nothing for the education that I got at LeMoyne."

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And that was a stepping stone to where he is today, even with his masters and soon to start working on his doctorate. So education, to me, that helps a lot. I mean even if you want to do a trade, if you want to be – go to nursing school. Go to school to be a cosmetology – at least do something. Don't just, as they say, hang out. You know? So that's my advice I would leave.

Markia Weathersby: Okay. We want to thank you for participating in the Crossroads to Freedom Project, and we enjoyed having you today.

Vivian Walker: Well thank you very much.

[End of Audio]