

Neighborhood Histories: Interview with Lemar Walker [@]

[You can use @ # \$ * to indicate speakers, then add their names in later]

[Please add timecodes every 2 minutes]

@ For missions and I'm going to Brazil in August and share the good news that God's for Jesus Christ with other people. So we involved in a lotta things in a lot of things in the community.

did you have any children?

@ I have 3 children. I have a daughter um 35 which would be finishing nursing school in December. I have a daughter going to Mary State. She is uh a senior at Mary State. She is in the honor society. I have a daughter she graduated from Whitehaven. She will be going to Tennessee State

\$ And now let's talk a little bit about your experiences growing up. Can you tell us about the neighborhood you grew up in?

@ The neighborhood I grew up in was a community. Same as when I grew up where having community. Integration had not taken place, so you had a large

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portion of African Americans in the inner city, and there was a community. We didn't have a lot of social years like we have now. We had some but not as widespread as they have today. And we uh didn't have much. The neighbors that we had uh you could go into a person house and get a cup of sugar. Just knock on the door. People didn't pretty much lock their doors and you could go in your neighbor's house and get some flour and they could come in your house and do the same thing, but some people didn't have

TVs. I would come home sometimes and some of my friends would be in my living room watching the TV. I wasn't able to at home. And so it was a community and people had.... They socialized with each other. Sometime in the summer time, we didn't have air conditioning and so people would sleep on the porch or have their doors open at night, and you know, so you could get a cool breeze

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and it was a community and sometimes, you know, you might have uh a problem uh two friend might get into a fight and would later on that evening and they would be uh friends again. It wasn't a lot of shooting like they have today. So it was a community. People have a lot of respect for adults. That's one thing I see today that's not uh. I wish young people would understand how important it is and I know that some of the parents today uh not teaching their children like they should. And so we've lost a lot of that but people were, even guys that would drink liquor on the street, and when they would see a lady coming, they would leave and hide the bottle, even uh a person that was intoxicated. And so people had respect for the church. People wouldn't uh, break in churches or o up in churches and rob people like today. And back in my day, they wouldn't even lock the church

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doors. They stayed open all the time. So it was a community and we really enjoyed it. Uh you had the Claiborne Halls, The Foot Homes, The Flower Homes, The Dixon Homes, and uh The Lauderdale Subs and all of us would gather along with each other.

\$ Who were your parents and what were they like?

@ My daddy left uh when I was maybe two or three years old. He was an alcoholic and was not a good father nor was he a good husband. And he left so I didn't know a lot about him. He moved to Detroit and got a good job but never sent anything back home. He never affirmed me uh never was around. And my Mother worked at night and so by her working, she was the um head cook at Justin's restaurant, one of the most influential restaurants in the city and so she was not home.

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But my oldest sister was home and uh she was like a mother figure. I respected her and respected????? as a mother figure. And uh she laid down the law and cooked for us and...and uh so my mother did the best she could to provide for us.

What schools did you attend?

@ I attended Alonzo____ Elementary School, Porter Jr. High, and I graduated from Booker T Washington High School. I graduated from Shelby State, with a degree in Criminal Justice. I graduated from Lemoyne Owen with a degree, Bachelors, and criminal justice with concentration in Social Science and I graduated with a degree in Social Science with a concentration in Criminal Justice and also from Chrichton College. I have a B.S. from Chrichton College with uh in their Youth Ministry.

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\$ What was school like for you?

@ Well, I always tell young people that I didn't apply myself. School was not hard, but I didn't do my work. And I always try to encourage young people to do their work. I had a good brain, but I didn't do my work. And so if you don't do your work, you're going to get the result. If you do your work, you get the results and so school was good. I just went through it just to be, you know, just to get through it, but was not good. I used my bad experience to try to help motivate young people today to do their best. And so just like I was growing up, my father was not home, but now I take what he was not and I have become what he was not to my children and also to the children I come in contact with.

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\$ Back in the day, the Lemoyne Garden Projects were feuding with other projects and created the gang LMG. Did you have any altercations with the gang and did they impact places you decided to go?

@ Well, back in our day, what we had were neighborhoods. And like if I went to a neighborhood, and I didn't belong over there, then there would be a fight. If I could run fast, I could get away. Or uh if I knew somebody in the community, then I was safe. But it was not killing like they do today. And uh, you find some guys today would even talk about how they used to have a feud with other parts and other people in parts of the community. Gangs today, is just, they're fighting over something that don't even exist. They don't own anything, and it's the killing. I think it's just, it's just out of hand. They have the wrong concept. They have a law that they say or a slogan that they say,

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they ??? growth and development. That's a misnomer to say that it's growth and development when you're out selling drugs and breaking in people's houses and robbing, stealing and killing. That's not right, if people would take what they learn from the gang and put it into something positive, because they do have a structure. They have a hierarchy of authority. If they used those same principles, and do something positive, they could really benefit the community instead of causing havoc in the community.

How did segregation impact your educational experiences?

@ Well, segregation uh, it really minimizes your exposure. Textbooks we were seeing,

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they would be old textbooks from other schools, white school. And we would get the old textbook and you can see in there, where you have to sign your name to it, how many people had the book before you got it. And so, I think one of the problems is the lack of exposure and the lack of material. And that's why it's so important to have the materials. So you can compete, in a mortal society. And uh, segregation also, it just limits, your opportunities. And one of the things that we do also is expose inner city children to a life outside of the inner city. We take them to camps, we take them on field trips, we even have taken some to Washington D.C. and New York because we want to broaden their horizon. One of the problems that I see, is that children,

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young people are not exposed. They don't understand the real world that we live in. They don't understand the world outside of the inner city. So therefore, they have no hope, no aspiration to become something. So one of the things that we do is try to expose children. And also, try to teach them how to read. I heard Shaquille O'Neil said that he like to read. And reading will expose him to a world outside of where he was at. And so, all of us try to teach children to read and to value life and to enjoy it. It's not just for a minority of people. It's for all of us. God created this world for us. You know, one of the problems that I see is when a young person, an eight-teen, twenty years old, going to a place, and rob a place for two or three hundred dollars. It's the lack of exposure. Why would you sacrifice yourself for freedom? Your

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Freedoms and your ability? And a lot of guys that are incarcerated, are very talented, very skillful, very smart, uh brain wise but they make bad decision, but it's the lack of exposure.

What churches have you attended throughout your life?

@ Well I really haven't grew up in church. My mother, she didn't have reliable resources and so she use to tell us she would send us to church when she was able to buy us some church clothes. Now whatever that may be but anyway, we went to church probably two or three times a year. Easter for one. You got your little Easter outfit and you went to church. And maybe Christmas uh but uh I didn't grow up in the church and when I became a Christian, well before I became a Christian, I was out in the streets. After I got out of the navy, I was involved in illegal activity. Selling dope and running around.

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I always worked so, I came to a point in my life where lie was not fulfilling to me. And so I knew something was born in my life and to make a long story short , one night I just got on my knees and cried like a baby and asked Christ to come into my life and he changed me. At the time I was going to St. Jude Missionary Baptist Church. I attended there at that church and I gave my life to the Lord. I was a member of uh??? Baptist Church. I helped start that church after I became a Christian. And I help start all the ????? Baptist Church. And I was also a member of uh..... True Life, Mt. Vernon Baptist Church.

And I attended First ?????? before I started my church, which I've been pastoring my church for fifth-teen going on six-teen years

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now.

Can you describe the church that you are pastoring at now?

@ Uh. Describe it? What do you mean?

Like can you tell us what it looks like? What describes some of the people that attend there?

@ Well the church I attend, we started in the ??? as I've mentioned before in January 1999. And when we started, my wife and I my two daughters started that church in the ??? and we were, I was working with an organization that was, I was the director of an abstinence program. And we would teach teenagers how to abstain from sex until marriage because one of the problems we've had is teenagers. Babies having babies. And that one of the single most causes of poverty in the inner city or in any city. And so we were teaching them to delay their sexual gratification until they got married. And as I was, we were in this

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in the ??? housing unit and the demographics were four hundred-sixty-five units. The average parents were uh, twenty-four years old, head of households, and female, the average of age twenty-four, uh and averaged four children. So I saw that as a good mission field to go in and to share the gospel and try to work with people and my wife and I started with a tutoring program a result to work with young people who were not on reading level. And so we started that and we stayed there for four years until they shut

them down. As you know they have built a nice facility over there. And so we stayed there because so many people had come in and they abandoned uh, they got grant money and they just abandoned the people. I call it exportation because they take advantage of poor people without resource. So we stayed there until they shut them down and we moved uh,

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five times in thirteen and a half years and we ministered to people that uh, disenfranchised or ??? the people that don't have a lot of resource. Because I can look at, I can identify with the people we minister to. So we have a, in our church we have some professional people but we have some people that are X felons. Uh people that were prostitutes and drug addicts and drug dealers and we try to raise up children were they won't have to go through those changes in their life and just become professional people. When I was in the ??? I saw what God had done when I first became a Christian through the lively young people, such as you all, and how they became professionals and they really became uh, God is using them in a mighty in the community. Business people, they finish college, some of them married to ministers and uh, I see the same thing that can happen to young people

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in our community. We just try to expose people. One of the problems that I see, is that people not taking advantage of their resources that they have in the community.

Can you describe some of the experiences in the Navy?

@ When I was in the Navy, in nineteen-sixty-seven, on February seventh, nineteen-sixty-seven, I knew I had to get out of Memphis. I had a job as a bus boy but I knew that was not for me. The Vietnam War was going on and I liked the uniforms they had and I knew they traveled a lot. So I went on and enrolled and signed up and went in. When I went in, it was only two of us. Two African Americans in the same company out of fifty-five guy and just the two of us. And the brothers' name was Paul Mc??? And we're still in touch with each other and still very good friends. But

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it was rough. We know what was going on in the sixties. We had the Civil Rights Movement , the Vietnam Protest, uh racism was running rampant and so we experienced a lot of that when I was in the Navy. And so I stayed in a lot of trouble because uh I didn't like the way people treated me. I mean , when we were living in the city, I was faced with a lot of racism. Things that I saw, uh in our community, how the police officers would treat African Americans it was much worse. When I was coming up, it was, I was born during Jim Crow. And so I experienced people sitting on the back of the bus and not able to go to certain restaurants and eat. And so you had some of the same people that were white Americans, that was in the Navy, that were taught those types of things. And they looked down on us because we're African Americans.

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And so it was not good. It was not good. And when I see people today, that are in the military, especially the Navy, uh and when they have a high rank, I really commend that. I don't know if ya'll saw the movie of Antwone Fisher but that were some of the things I experienced. It was real bad. We had a lot of problems with people. Not wanting you to succeed and not wanting you to advance because of your skin color. So it was very difficult. And sometimes I, I breaks my heart how people not accept you for what you are. And I tell people today they need to be upset with God because God created us. We didn't have an opportunity to go and pick our skin color. Our noses , our mouths, our eyes. And God made us who we are. And so when people don't accept me for who I am, as

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an African American, they should have a problem with God. And we should not reciprocate means to not to treat people like the treat others. We should treat people like God wants us to treat them. But see they're the ones with the problem, not me.

\$ Can you share some of the memories from your childhood that influenced you later on in life?

@ Well my mother was very???? in helping me to make me feel, to help me to feel like I was worth something. She used to always tell me, "Better have a good brain". I started drinking when I was in the elementary school when I was coming up. I was hurting and really didn't know why. But she used to

always encourage me that I was, was smart. But I didn't apply myself. I used to see children making good grades, making honor roll and I always used to wonder, "How did they make those grades?", but they went home and did their homework. Guess what I did? I went home and played cards,

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coming out on the corner, and things like that. So when you apply yourself you really can accomplish much in life. And what I found out was or one of the guys that helped me after I became a Christian was a guy named Willie Louis. And Willie Lois was my age but he was a very good mentor uh for me. And he used to tell me, "If you apply yourself, then you get the result". And so I start studying hard. When I went to Shelby State, I studied hard and I started making good grades. I stared focusing in on passing the material. I graduated Shelby State with a three-point-two, from Lemoyne Owen with a three-point-four and Chrichton with a three-point-four so I worked hard. Plus I was working full time going to school full time with a family and a small church. So I did that to encourage the young people that they can do the same thing. We need to,

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We need to learn to take advantage of the opportunity we have.

What would you say is your most fun or the best memory you've had growing up?

@ Uh. The fun we had was.... Back in our day we had good music. We had uh the Temptations and Smokey Robinson and the Miracles and ?????????? and ?????? and uh we had uh good music, good lyrics. And we used to go to dances and sit around and talk to each other. We just had good, clean fun. Those the kind of things we created. Uh good games and I played ball at Brown Park and I looked forward for that in the community in the summer time because it kept us out of trouble. So those the kind of things I really enjoyed. Just hanging out with the guys and talking to the guys so those, you became brothers. When I see guys I grew up with, It was like we are brothers because we share a common

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bond with each other.