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Damesha Boone: On behalf of Crossroads to Freedom, Rose College, and Knowledge Quest, I want to thank you for taking the time to share your story with us today. I'm Damesha Boone, and I'm honored to meet you and learn from your inspirational story. Today's interview will be archived online at Crossroads to Freedom website. Today's date is July 2nd, 2014. Can you state some basic biographical information for the record? What is your name?

Booker Doss: My name, Booker T. Doss.

Damesha Boone: If you don't mind me asking, what year were you born?

Booker Doss: **Brooklyn**, Mississippi.

Damesha Boone: What year?

Booker Doss: Oh, 1918.

Damesha Boone: Where were you born and raised?

Booker Doss: Brooklyn, Mississippi.

Damesha Boone: What is or what was your occupation?

Booker Doss: What was my occupation? I worked at a chemical plant. ____ ____
____ _____. Not at the ____ ____ ____ _____. Mm-hmm.

Damesha Boone: Did you enjoy your job?

[0:01:00]

Booker Doss: Huh?

Damesha Boone: Did you enjoy your job?

Booker Doss: Did I enjoy my job? Yes, I did.

Damesha Boone: Can you elaborate and tell us what you did?

Booker Doss: Well, I **manufact** all the cleaning supply, the Duty Floors, I used to have big tanks and I used to manufacture all that wax and all that chemical supply they use right now. *[Mumbling under breath]* I did that.

Damesha Boone: Did you ever marry?

Booker Doss: Yes.

Damesha Boone: How many years were you married?

Booker Doss: Oh, I don't know about married. Since then, it been about 60 years.

Damesha Boone: What is your spouse's name?

Booker Doss: Grace; Gracie Love Doss.

Damesha Boone: And what was her occupation?

Booker Doss: She was a – she was a maid.

Damesha Boone: Did you have children?

[0:02:00]

Booker Doss: Mm-hmm.

Damesha Boone: What were their names?

Booker Doss: Wallace Doss, Nancy Doss, and Vernet Doss.

Damesha Boone: How old are your children?

Booker Doss: How old are they? One is 92 – well, 72, and Nancy is 71. And Vernet was 70.

Damesha Boone: Now, let's talk a little bit about your experiences growing up. Can you tell me about the neighborhood you grew up in?

Booker Doss: Yes, I can. I grew up in the _____ of Mississippi. I used to go fishing, swimming, and I raised on a farm. I used to milk cows, if you want to know all that. And well, it's a lot of thousand things that I know. And I used to work at old –

[0:03:00]

_____ grocery _____. I was a supervisor over 12 years. I see ____ supply, _____ supply.

Damesha Boone: What was your home life like?

Booker Doss: Oh, my home life was beautiful. Okay.

Damesha Boone: Can you tell me what made your home life beautiful?

Booker Doss: Yes. That's where – that's where I got my schooling was schooling I got – that's where I got my school. That's where I went to church there. That's where I met a lot of good friends.

Damesha Boone: What were your parents and what were they like?

Booker Doss: Huh?

Damesha Boone: I mean who were your parents and what were they like?

Booker Doss: Oh, my – my dad was named Henry. Beautiful. My mother was Evelyn; Evelyn Brooks before she married.

Damesha Boone: What schools did you attend?

Booker Doss: Brooklyn Mississippi High School.

[0:04:00]

And I went to Macon, Mississippi Training School.

Damesha Boone: What was school like for you?

Booker Doss: Oh, it was lovely, lovely.

Damesha Boone: Can you tell me why you loved school?

Booker Doss: Yes, I used to love school. I used to like playing baseball, basketball, and I like all that sports.

Damesha Boone: Would you say you was a star basketball player?

Booker Doss: Beg your pardon?

Damesha Boone: Would you say you like a star, like you were really good at it?

Booker Doss: Yes, I do.

Damesha Boone: What churches did you attend and what were they like?

Booker Doss: Mount Airy Baptist Church. It was beautiful.

Damesha Boone: Can you share some of the memories from your childhood that influenced you later on in life?

Booker Doss: Huh?

Damesha Boone: Can you share some memories that influenced your childhood later on in life?

Booker Doss: Yes. I want to – I used to love fishing. I liked hunting.

[0:05:00]

And I liked the church. I was Sunday school teacher. And I used to have a class for 25 or 30. And I used to teach a men's Bible class. All loved the church and all like that. I'm still today.

Damesha Boone: Can you tell me why you liked to hunt?

Booker Doss: Say – can I tell you about what?

Damesha Boone: Why you liked to hunt?

Booker Doss: Like I liked to hunt?

Damesha Boone: Yes.

Booker Doss: Yes, well, I liked – I love fishing and things like that. Yeah.

Damesha Boone: Can you tell me what made it fun? Can you tell me what made fishing and hunting fun?

Booker Doss: Say can I tell you what now?

Damesha Boone: What made it fun, fishing and hunting?

Booker Doss: Fishing, I used to go fishing on a lake and they have those _____ log and I used to get out there with me a hook –

[0:06:00]

And get out there and catch those big brims and everything. It was really fun. I love to do that now, but I'm not able to that anymore.

Damesha Boone: Okay. Let's talk about how life in South Memphis used to be. What does South Memphis mean to you?

Booker Doss: What South Memphis used to be? It used to be – I supervised a lot of – since I've been living where I am now, I supervise about maybe 20 people. They used to come in there and clean up that neighborhood right where I am now. And I supervised all them; supervised them to help keep that neighborhood clean. So I think they need to – they need to get a – they need to do that now, to get somebody to clean out those alleys and things because –

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Well, I don't see no grass too much more now. And you know, different snakes and lizard be there, but I don't see no now. But that's what I did one year. And so I think they still need to send somebody there to clean that neighborhood up. Really.

Damesha Boone: What does South Memphis mean to you?

Booker Doss: It mean a lot to me because that's where I live or that's where my home. And I like for it to be comfortable and neat and clean. Clean and gardens, mm-hmm.

Damesha Boone: What was going on in South Memphis during the '60s and '70s?

Booker Doss: Huh?

Damesha Boone: What was going on in South Memphis during the '60s and '70s?

Booker Doss: What was going on? Well, the same thing I just tell you. And I used to work on a Democratic executive committee. And I would like to – I did all the things to try to make this –

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City a better city, not only the city a better city and this world a better world, and I believe in the church and I believe in the Holy Bible. God, he said love everyone. And I would like to ask y'all, do you know who is God? I like to ask you that. Do you know who is God? See, she won't answer me that. And do you believe in God?

Damesha Boone: Yes, sir, I do.

Booker Doss: Huh?

Damesha Boone: Yes, sir.

Booker Doss: Oh, I'm talking to all of y'all. Do y'all believe in God? [*Answers from the background*] All right. Now, you believe in God. Who – when you sleep right now, who woke you up?

Damesha Boone: God.

Booker Doss: God. And listen; God is – see, if God didn't wake – I used to teach a class. If God didn't wake you up –

[0:09:00]

Me and you, we'd have been sleep right now. And look; I don't know where you go – I believe in going to the House of God to study God's word. God is a supreme being and no other power above him. He keep this city. Nothing you can do and nothing I can do. If God didn't send rain and the sunshine for the food and the grocery we eat, aint nothing you – you can't make nothing. Don't never let nobody tell you that anything that you can create because you're not – okay.

God give you feets. If God – if he didn't get you feets and leg, you wouldn't be able to walk. And if you – look; this body is a temple.

[0:10:00]

A temple of God. And spoke – now close your eyes now. Suppose you couldn't see. Close your eyes. You wouldn't know – you wouldn't – you couldn't even go out that door. So one of the things, I don't know whether y'all go the House of God or whether you read God's word, all this technology that these people got now, God's calling us because man can't create nothing. He create you. Look; when you know anything new in the world, and it said – I don't know whether – I hope y'all offer – I hope you obey your **parents**.

Okay, you got _____. If you didn't have hay, you'll starve because you wouldn't have nothing to eat till somebody feed you.

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So I just wanted to get that over to you. I go to Greater Whitestone, not only got to – I'm 95. If I live three more months, I'll be 96. I got grandchildren and great-grandchildren, some of them younger than y'all and some older than y'all. See, how God – and that's God that brought me this far. I used to be a _____. I still sing. But _____ I got a sinus in my voice and like that. Now, I used to – I

used to sing, and I sang in a group. And ____ said that, I'd sing with anybody in the nation. I sang praises to God. And nothing like praising God.

And when you – I want to ask you, do y'all say your prayers at night when you get home? Ask God to wake you up.

[0:12:00]

See now, if God didn't wake you up, you don't ____ or robs to get through, ____ that. That's God keep watch over you. Keep watch over me. He calls me to be living as long as I am now. So my – I just want to get that over to y'all. I just want to know have y'all been taught that.

Damesha Boone: How is South Memphis different now than when you –

Booker Doss: Huh?

Damesha Boone: How was South Memphis different now than from when you were growing up?

Booker Doss: Well, South Memphis is different now because they got a lot of those town – apartments down there, don't nobody live in them. And it used to – it was nothing but a resident, but they build them down there. And so that kind make a difference. And they board up, and I wished they could get some tenants to be in there where they could help keep them clean. That's one thing they need –

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They need to do. They need to – I don't know what they charge for those places, but they need to be where people can have a decent place to live. God intend for everybody to have a home, place to see. And one thing I would just like to say, some of these young people, I want to be better. Some of these young people, they don't dress proper. They don't talk proper.

They need to go to school to learn how to speak and how to talk and how to be kind and loving 'cause God is love. And you can't keep no Commandment, but the closest thing that you can –

[0:14:00]

We – you can do is love 'cause God give us the Ten Commandments. Said thou shall not kill, thou shall not steal. But

some of these things, you can't do it, but the closest thing in God word is love. When you can love __ ____, you aint no more under the law 'cause God is love. Okay. Go on with your __ question. I want to get that through y'all.

Damesha Boone: What were your neighbors in South Memphis like?

Booker Doss: Well, they – you got some nice, and you – nice neighborhood. We once had a watch group. We would watch the neighborhood to keep people from stealing. We never – I aint never heard nobody having no problem but now in the neighborhood. Mm-hmm.

[0:15:00]

Damesha Boone: Do you know – do you still know of any people that were on the neighborhood watch program that you were alive then?

Booker Doss: Mm-hmm.

Damesha Boone: Can you name some?

Booker Doss: Huh?

Damesha Boone: Can you name some that were on the neighborhood watch program?

Booker Doss: Said do I know the name?

Damesha Boone: Could you name some, name some people?

Booker Doss: I didn't understand what you said.

Damesha Boone: Could you name some people that were on the neighborhood –

Booker Doss: Oh, Fred Dorothy, and oh Lord. There's so many of them. When we first – I was the president when we first – see, a lot of them are older peoples. A lot of them done died out. You know. Some of them younger than I am. Some of them was older than I am. So we aint got too many younger than I in that abandoned neighborhood, but they __ ____. We had a group where a club, watch club, watched that neighborhood. But that don't operate no more.

[0:16:00]

Uh-uh, no. Mm-hmm.

Damesha Boone: What was the reputation of South Memphis and how has it changed?

Booker Doss: Huh?

Damesha Boone: The reputation of South Memphis, what was it and how has it changed?

Booker Doss: Have changed a lot. See, we aint got no more neighborhood watch and we aint got nobody to clean up the neighborhood.

Damesha Boone: What are some places in South Memphis that make it a good place to live?

Booker Doss: Well, where I'm living I think it's a good place to live. There's – if you – if everybody keep it clean.

Damesha Boone: Let's go back to the neighborhood watch program. Did you have any problems during that time?

Booker Doss: No. Uh-uh. No, we don't never. Uh-uh, no. No. No.

[0:17:00]

Damesha Boone: Was there any problem with the civil rights and the sanitation of –

Booker Doss: Uh-uh.

Damesha Boone: _____, anything?

Booker Doss: No, no, no, no, no. No.

Damesha Boone: Exactly what happened – what all did you do besides look after people in the neighborhood?

Booker Doss: What part I do?

Damesha Boone: Yes, sir.

Booker Doss: Say huh?

Damesha Boone: Exactly what all did you do besides look after people in the neighborhood?

Booker Doss: The only thing I do, I supervise them to help clean that neighborhood up. That's the only thing I do. Mm-hmm.

Damesha Boone: What is the best thing going on about South Memphis?

Booker Doss: Well, the only thing I said now, everything is kind of – everything is kind of cool far as I know. The best thing I know is –

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I don't – maybe I'm lost for one, but the best thing I know now, people need to learn to love and worship God and young men should not wear their pants down behind. So that's that thing. If you gonna – do young people, there's one thing I wish sometime I think we need a correction school. That's one of the best thing I know. When these young people, boys go with their pants down behind, I think they ought to have a correction school center to see to them. And I'm just saying to y'all, do you think they gonna get a job with their pants down behind?

Damesha Boone: No, sir.

Booker Doss: Keep yourself neat –

[0:19:00]

And clean if you can. And be kind and be loving. That's one of the best things that I can tell you, the young people do. They supposed to listen to the older people. Honor your father and your mother. He say your days will be long, the lamb, what the Lord gonna give you. That's one of the best things that I know I could tell the young people. Young people, don't be lazy. That's the best thing I know for now to tell them _____. Don't be lazy 'cause in the scriptures, say God never called a lazy person.

You got to get – and if you don't work, you don't eat. And don't steal. Don't rob. That's the best thing I know to tell you. Don't steal and don't rob. Keep yourself clean.

[0:20:00]

Learn how to speak, and be kind. That's the best thing I know to tell them for the neighborhood. I see a lot of young boys going up and down the street down there. I wish I could get them to some place where I can teach them the word of God. 'Cause I don't know whether they – that's the best thing I know I can tell them, learn the word of God and be kind. Honor thy father and mother.

And then don't start a family till you get grown. That's the best thing I – that's the best – one of the best things I know. And okay, now girls, and the boys, don't get grown, start a family. Okay, I know a lot of boys and –

[0:21:00]

Girls come up with another child and the boy's gone and he aint got no job, so don't try to get married or start a family until you've learned to get a job. This is one of the best things I can tell you, don't try to start a family till you get a job and wait. And see, the world don't owe you nothing. You need to work for your living. Work for your living.

Damesha Boone: I see that on your shirt that you're a member of Greater Whitestone Missionary Baptist Church.

Booker Doss: Uh-huh, yeah, mm-hmm.

Damesha Boone: Could you tell us a little about the **pass** of your church?

Booker Doss: Huh?

Damesha Boone: The pass of your church, could you tell us a little bit more about it?

Booker Doss: The pastor?

Damesha Boone: The pass of your church?

Booker Doss: Oh, ever since I know Greater Whitestone, it always have been a great church. And you need – I don't know whether you've been there or not.

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Sometime you need to – you need to go there and visit, just hear the young people sing. And go teach a class, learn God's word, learn how to be kind, friendly, and loving 'cause God is love. Greater Whitestone always have been – it's been a great church.

Damesha Boone: Has your church been involved in anything –

Booker Doss: Huh?

Damesha Boone: Has your church been involved in anything dealing with the community in the past?

Booker Doss: Yes, uh-huh. We had friend day Sunday. There were there by the hundreds and thousands. And I had friends there. I have made a lot of friends in my life, and they were – I had a lot on that Sunday. Yeah, at Greater Whitestone. We got a great pastor there.

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Reverend Roger Brown. He's an angelic man.

Damesha Boone: Was your church involved in everything dealing with the civil rights movement, anything like that, in the past?

Booker Doss: Yes, mm-hmm.

Damesha Boone: Could you elaborate on that?

Booker Doss: Well, they just don't – they go out. They have certain people that they are kind of _____ but – well, they have different things. So it's so much going on to you can't pinpoint everything that's going on in the church 'cause you know you got different mind there. Some folk gonna go for this and some are going for the other. But the only thing I can point to Greater Whitestone are first, ask God to direct you.

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Anything we gonna do, that's me now, ask God to direct you because if God didn't give us a mind, we wouldn't have knowledge enough to go out that door. _____. So if you read the scripture, _____ didn't have but – he had 30,000 people's and he couldn't win a battle, but God brought him down to 300. And then they won a battle. So some – we going through now. For the election of a lot of peoples.

I support things, but I would just like to say it gonna take God; it gonna take – some folks go for a lot of money. But if God – see, God own everything.

[0:25:00]

And don't take a lot of money sometimes for to win a battle because if God for – oh, but I'd like to tell you this. It was the 12 tribes of Israel, and the 10 lost tribes, they got so weak that God swallowed them up. And you aint heard from them from this day to that. Okay.

Damesha Boone: Is there anything you would like to add on that we haven't covered already?

Booker Doss: Only thing I like to add on to you in my closing remarks, trust and God and ask him to teach you and give you strength and give you love. That's my closing my remarks. That's the only thing I do in closing remarks. Okay.

[0:26:00]

Damesha Boone: Thank you for participating in the Crossroads to Freedom project, and we want you to have a blessed day.

Booker Doss: Well, thank you and I trust God that I have said something to help you and to help this world.

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