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Earline Duncan, 2010

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LaKevia Perry: On behalf of Crossroads to Freedom at Rhodes College, we would like to thank you for coming today and sharing your story with us. Today is July 23, 2010. My name is LaKevia Perry, and this is Bryson Whitney. We are both honored to be conducting this interview and to find out a little bit more about Memphis. Today's interview will be available online at www.crossroadstofreedom.org. Let's start with some basic biographical questions to get your memory going. Can you state your name?

Earline Duncan: Earline W. Duncan.

LaKevia Perry: And what year were you born?

Earline Duncan: In 1936.

LaKevia Perry: And where were you born and raised?

Earline Duncan: Right here in Memphis, Tennessee.

LaKevia Perry: What neighborhood?

Earline Duncan: Noth Memphis. Not North Memphis, Noth Memphis.

LaKevia Perry: And what is your occupation?

Earline Duncan: I'm a retired schoolteacher.

LaKevia Perry: And who were your parents?

Earline Duncan: _____ Walsh and Alice Owens.

LaKevia Perry: And what were their occupations?

[0:01:00]

Earline Duncan: My dad worked at an automobile place, and my mother was just a homemaker.

LaKevia Perry: Describe any brothers or sisters that you have.

Earline Duncan: I had two brothers and one sister. I have one brother who is deceased, and I have another brother who works now for the City of Memphis, and my sister works for the State of Tennessee. My sister was born when I was between my freshman and sophomore year in college –

LaKevia Perry: Oh, wow.

Earline Duncan: – and my mother died when she was ten, so she was more like my daughter than my sister.

LaKevia Perry: Oh, okay. Interesting. Now let's talk about how you were when you were growing up. Can you tell me about your neighborhood?

Earline Duncan: Well, my neighborhood was really a mixed neighborhood. It was called the **Greenlaw** subdivision, the Greenlaw area in North Memphis, and so there were a few Jews who owned the grocery stores, a few Italians who owned grocery stores on one end, and we were the little black people who were in the middle.

[0:02:04] And so, we would go from one to the other, and sometimes we'd play with their children and their children played with us, but, basically, it was a segregated neighborhood, as such, but we found ways to get together.

LaKevia Perry: How did you find those ways to get together?

Earline Duncan: Well, just kids-play, and just when they would come out of the grocery store, we would play with them and they would play with us, because really and truly, with their parents being owners of the grocery store, they didn't have anybody else to play with because the grocery stores were in our neighborhood, so they'd have to go home in the afternoon, but they just played with us.

LaKevia Perry: So, how did that affect you, like once you got older?

Earline Duncan: When I got older and got ready to go to college, that was when it really hit me what was going on, because, at that time, we could not go to Memphis State.

[0:03:00] It wasn't Memphis University, it was Memphis State, and I had to go to LeMoyne, which was not LeMoyne-Owen, it was just LeMoyne, and my tuition at that time was \$150.00 a semester, but they only paid \$60.00 every semester at Memphis State. So, it really did kind of get to me that we had a state school that I could not attend, and my poor little parents, who worked very hard, had to pay \$150.00 a semester, while these folks were going to school for \$60.00 a semester. And the way I knew that was because one of the little boys at the Italian grocery store told me, "Well, I don't pay but \$60.00 a semester to go to school," and he kind of said it arrogantly.

LaKevia Perry: Wow.

Earline Duncan: So, that was one of the ways, and I think that was where I really started to realize what a difference segregation made.

[0:04:07]

LaKevia Perry: So, other than playing with the neighborhood grocer's children, were there any other experiences in your childhood that may have influenced you later in life?

Earline Duncan: In terms of the black-white situation?

LaKevia Perry: Any way.

Earline Duncan: Oh. Well, there were a lot _____ influenced me. I guess one of the greatest influences I had was my schooling. I went to **Manassas**, and I had gone to **Grant** Elementary, and, at that time, black teachers just had a concern for the whole child. It was not unusual for students to go home with their teachers. Teachers visited often.

[0:05:00] Teachers visited the homes. They actually had home visits, that they would come and talk to your parents, and there was just a lot of encouragement. And in high school, oh, my high school teachers, they were just always so awesome, because we learned so much, and I realized how much we had learned once I started college. I mean there was just a lot of things that I actually knew that I wouldn't have known had it not been for those teachers.

LaKevia Perry: Do you think that segregation made that more possible, for your teachers to be more of an influence, or –

Earline Duncan: I wish. I really wish. Segregation gave us teachers who were concerned, but we lacked the materials. Even though the teachers worked very hard, we did lack some materials that other students had, and I was one of those who we actually used the books that the white kids had used.

[0:06:06] Our books were secondhand. We got the books after they discarded them. I don't think the teachers could have been any better, I just think they could have had more material to actually use to work with us.

LaKevia Perry: Did religion play a role in your growing up?

Earline Duncan: Oh, most definitely, and –

LaKevia Perry: How so?

Earline Duncan: – still does.

Bryson Whitney: Which church did you attend?

Earline Duncan: St. James AME Church. I was christened there. I think they told me I was nine months old, or something, when I was christened, and I'm still a member of that same church in North Memphis.

Bryson Whitney: That's great. Well, I'm gonna ask you a few questions, but we want to target the period between the '50s and '70s. Thinking back to that point, what was life like for you back then? What were you involved in during this period?

[0:07:04]

Earline Duncan: I graduated from high school in 1954 –

Bryson Whitney: From Manassas?

Earline Duncan: – from Manassas. Yes, from Manassas. _____. Went to college at LeMoyne, and I was working, so having to work, and I actually worked – when I went to college, I worked eight hours. I went to school from 8:00 to 4:00, and I worked from 4:00 to 12:00 –

Bryson Whitney: Wow.

Earline Duncan: – and so there was very little time for me to take too much outside activity, but college. In high school, I started working at 12. I worked in a beauty shop with a lady who, I would shampoo hair for her customers. Then, when I got 14, there was a department store downtown called **Bree's** Department Store, and I went down there and I lied and said I was 16, and they hired me in the beauty shop, and so I worked in that beauty shop when I was 14, 15 and 16.

[0:08:06]

Finally, when I got 16, and the man in charge said, “Oh, I won't go to jail now. You finally did get 16,” I started working as an elevator driver. At that time, elevators had to be driven. They weren't automatic, so you actually took the handle and said, “Up,” and, “Down,” and up and down, and I worked in Bree's Department Store each summer, after school was out, or in the summertime I worked there. Then, in 1954, when I got ready to go to college, I had an aunt who worked at the West Tennessee **T. Burger local** hospital.

Bryson Whitney: Where was that located?

Earline Duncan: The hospital is still there, they just don't call it that anymore, since they don't have any need for that, and we're glad of that. It's at the corner of **Dunlap** and – I believe it was Dunlap and **Jefferson**. It's right across from the _____.

- LaKevia Perry:* Oh, okay.
- Earline Duncan:* That hospital that's right across from the _____, directly across from the _____. It's a gray building.
- [0:09:01]* I had an aunt who worked there, and she got me a job working from 4:00 until 12:00, and so I worked from 4:00 to 12:00 all through college. I stayed at that job until I got out of college.
- Bryson Whitney:* All right. Well, it seems like you were working at a lot of different places. What led you into – did you study to go into education when you were in college?
- Earline Duncan:* I had wanted to go into speech therapy, and there was nowhere in Memphis that I could have gone to school – and I couldn't afford to go anywhere else – to actually major in speech therapy, dealing with children and their speech, so the next best thing was education, and then, too, there was very little else that we could really do. It wasn't like I could do a lot of things. Usually, there was just the black teacher, the black doctor, the black lawyer, the black nurse, but we weren't as open.
- [0:10:04]* We didn't have as many things offered to us that we could actually go into to, where we could diversify what we wanted to do, without leaving Memphis, and me not being able to afford to leave Memphis, it was just very limited.
- Bryson Whitney:* Right. So, when did you graduate from LeMoyne?
- Earline Duncan:* When did I graduate from LeMoyne?
- Bryson Whitney:* Mm hmm.
- Earline Duncan:* In 1959.
- Bryson Whitney:* In '59?
- Earline Duncan:* Mm hmm.
- Bryson Whitney:* And did you move right into education? Did you –
- Earline Duncan:* Mm hmm.
- Bryson Whitney:* Which school were you working at?
- Earline Duncan:* I went to **Klondike**.
- Bryson Whitney:* Okay. What was Klondike like?

Earline Duncan: Oh, Klondike was wonderful. It was funny, because my principal at Klondike had been my Sunday school teacher, so she treated me just like I was still in her Sunday school class, but that was okay, and I stayed there seven years, until I got pregnant and I left on maternity leave.

Bryson Whitney: Okay. What grades did you teach?

Earline Duncan: I taught sixth grade, and seventh and eighth grade English at Klondike.

[0:11:02]

Bryson Whitney: Okay, the entire time?

Earline Duncan: Hmm?

Bryson Whitney: Was that the entire time you were there, at Klondike?

Earline Duncan: Well, I taught sixth grade for four years, and seventh and eighth grade English for two.

Bryson Whitney: Okay, and so after Klondike, where did you end up moving to?

Earline Duncan: I went to Grant for about a year and a half, from Grant, that's where they sent me a certified letter and said I had to go to Snowden or I would not have a job.

Bryson Whitney: Oh, really?

LaKevia Perry: Wow.

Bryson Whitney: Okay. Well, the late '50s, when we saw *Brown v. Board of Education*, did any major changes happen in Memphis –

Earline Duncan: Not at that time.

Bryson Whitney: – at the time? Not at all?

Earline Duncan: Nuh-uh.

Bryson Whitney: Okay, so –

Earline Duncan: Nothing –

Bryson Whitney: – nothing that –

Earline Duncan: – other than people started just rumbling, you know, the mumbling under breath, the uneasiness that comes when something like that takes place.

[0:12:00] And so, you know, it's, "What's it going to be like when that comes to Memphis?" and a lot of the elders, I'm one of them now, but at that time, a lot of the older people would say, "Oh, it'll never happen in Memphis," because they just couldn't see it because we had been segregated, with segregated buses, segregated everything.

Bryson Whitney: That must have been a little strange, with the *Brown v. Board* happening, but then seeing no changes in Memphis.

Earline Duncan: Not immediately.

Bryson Whitney: Were there any people in the community that were advocating for this quick change or this integration?

Earline Duncan: I had one of the first classes. As they said, they're trying things out. Well, when I was at Grant, I had what they called a transfer class. One day, I carried my sixth grade class over to _____ School, which was a white school, and the kids worked together for a day, you know, just to see _____ sixth grade class –

Bryson Whitney: It was just a one-time thing?

Earline Duncan: – yeah, it was just the one time. They may have had several classes to do it, but I just happened to be one of them.

[0:13:07] They were very conscious of the people they chose to do it. They wanted the teacher to be mild-mannered and acceptable, and the children to be mild and the children well disciplined, and blah-blah-blah. It was kind of chosen with white gloves as to what teachers would participate in that program, but there were a few interchanges before that, before we actually got the full-blown _____.

Bryson Whitney: What was that like for that one day, just to have that –

Earline Duncan: It was fun, but you could tell it was staged. You know, I had staged my children. I had told them, "You better not act up," and I imagine she had done the same thing to hers, but the kids, they fared well. They enjoyed it. You know, kids are kids, so once the day started, it was just a day with them. They forgot what color they were.

[0:14:00]

Bryson Whitney: Was it covered in the news at all?

Earline Duncan: Hmm?

Bryson Whitney: Was it covered in the news at all?

Earline Duncan: No.

Bryson Whitney: No?

Earline Duncan: No.

Bryson Whitney: Okay. Well –

Earline Duncan: We didn't fight, so they didn't put it on the news.

Bryson Whitney: The differences in the schools, was that apparent at all, maybe like the different resources that were available?

Earline Duncan: There was a difference. We could see the difference.

Bryson Whitney: How did that make the students feel?

Earline Duncan: I don't think they were aware of it as much as I was.

Bryson Whitney: _____.

LaKevia Perry: Around what time period was this?

Earline Duncan: This was probably – let's see. That was in '67. This was probably '68 or '69.

LaKevia Perry: That's kind of late.

Bryson Whitney: Yeah, that was really late.

Earline Duncan: Oh, Lord, yeah. Oh, Lord, yes. Yes. I told you, Memphis was a while.

Bryson Whitney: _____ a long while.

LaKevia Perry: What other school did you go to, did you teach at?

[0:15:00]

Earline Duncan: After Snowden?

LaKevia Perry: Mm hmm.

Earline Duncan: **Lester.** I went back to the ‘hood. Lester is in _____, and enjoyed every moment of it, because, at that time, I went to what they called Lester Demonstration School, and, at that time, we had everything. You know, at Snowden, I had ample material, you know, when I got to Snowden, but at Lester we had more than ample material. _____ opened up the first class, upper classmen went to _____ at Lester school, and so the kids had computers that they carried home with them. It was called a demonstration school. What happened at that time, if the school system had something that they wanted to try, they would try it at the demonstration school, and we would decide whether they would actually accept it as a project or reject it.

LaKevia Perry: So, you said that you taught at Snowden. What were the years that you taught there?

[0:16:01]

Earline Duncan: See, I told you was gonna ask me about the years. I think I went to Snowden in, let’s see, ‘67, ‘68 _____. I probably went to Snowden in the ‘70 – ‘71 school year, or ‘71 to ‘72, one of those. When you knew, you just knew, but I must say that the principal made us very comfortable. He knew the situation, because he had a lot of upheaval because some white teachers had been sent to black schools, and some black teachers had been sent to a white school. I can tell you something now that I didn’t know then. I can tell you that they took some of the best black teachers and sent them to the white schools, and they took some of the worst white teachers and sent them to the black schools. I know that now. I didn’t know it then, but I know that now _____.

LaKevia Perry: So, how did you learn this?

[0:17:00]

Earline Duncan: Well, you just have a sense of observation, and then you start snooping around and asking questions about the people who left, okay?

Bryson Whitney: Mm hmm.

Earline Duncan: And then, you ask at another school about the people who left, and then you see some of your friends have been transferred, like you, and you say, “You got transferred, too?” and they say, “Yeah,” and you ask, “Well what about the people whose place you took?” and you find that there’s a pattern.

- LaKevia Perry:* So, how was that, being transferred from an all-black school to Snowden?
- Earline Duncan:* It didn't bother me because I loved to teach, and so it didn't matter about the children.
- [0:17:57]
- I did have one of my colleagues to tell me not to touch the children because they didn't like to be touched, and I said if I had a child in my room who didn't want to be touched, their mama better come and get them, because I touch anything that I teach, and so I didn't never have any problem. No child ever told me not to touch them.
- Bryson Whitney:* Was Snowden fully integrated at this point, when you were at the school?
- Earline Duncan:* Mm hmm. I mean, fully? What do you mean by fully?
- Bryson Whitney:* Well –
- Earline Duncan:* Do you want to see the pictures of my classroom? When I went, I think we were 99 and 44/100 percent white.
- Bryson Whitney:* Four percent?
- Earline Duncan:* I said, you know, the Ivory soap had a commercial that said, "We're 99 and 44/100 pure," and I said the school, Snowden, was 99 and 44/100 percent white. I think in my first class, I might have had two black children, three at the most. I was trying to think who they were, but if you look at some of those pictures you can see them, the pictures that I brought. You can see how integrated we were.
- [0:19:00]
- Bryson Whitney:* Okay.
- Earline Duncan:* At first, but then, gradually, it improved because what they had was free transferring. You could transfer into a school that was predominantly – where you are going to be predominantly _____, so black children could come into Snowden, and white children could have gone into a black school, but that didn't happen. You just had the other way around. You had black parents getting their children into schools that had been predominantly white, and most of those parents were parents who had means to do that, because it meant you had to furnish the transportation, and a lot of poor parents, who couldn't, then their children were just left in the black schools until they had the, what

is it, _____ they had busing, where the kids were bused out of their neighborhood into another school.

Bryson Whitney: Do you remember the names of any of those area students, the African-American students?

Earline Duncan: Oh, Lord, yes.

[0:20:01]

Bryson Whitney: What were their names?

Earline Duncan: I had **Beverly Cohen**. I had **Althea Grain**, who is also a teacher at Snowden. She may have retired, but she was a teacher at Snowden for a long time. She was one of the students at Snowden at that time. I had **Luther Jones**, **Elvira Leechman**. Those were the children who were in those classes where there were very few black children. I had the little boy that's a minister now out at Gold – I think the name of his church is – **Reverend Stevens**.

Bryson Whitney: Oh, at Golden Gate?

Earline Duncan: If it's Golden Gate, he was in my class.

Bryson Whitney: I go to school with one of his sons.

Earline Duncan: Oh, okay. Well, I taught him.

Bryson Whitney: Oh, okay. I didn't know he went to Snowden.

Earline Duncan: Yeah, he went to Snowden.

Bryson Whitney: Yeah, he's a nice guy.

Earline Duncan: He is. He was a nice little boy.

[0:21:00]

Bryson Whitney: Were there ever any problems that you saw between students of different races, because these were black students in a majority white student environment? Were there ever any problems? Were they given any trouble?

Earline Duncan: You know what? If there were, I probably didn't look at it as a black and white problem, just children with problems. I mean that was not my concept. I didn't go into my class trying to discover who were the black children – well, I didn't see color when I went into the classroom, and the kids didn't see color when they saw

me. I can give you a good example. I had this little girl, Deirdre **Haid**. I can see her right now, cute as a pup, and she was in the day of the little hippie, you know, and so her parents were kind of hippie and she was kind of hippie. So, we get this little current newspaper that's called *Weekly Reader*, and in the *Weekly Reader* that time, they had something about the welfare Cadillac's and the people in Chicago who were driving welfare Cadillac's.

[0:22:04]

They were on welfare, but they were driving Cadillac's, and blah-blah-blah. So, Deirdre came and she said, "Oh, Miss Duncan. Those black people, they do this and they do that, and they do the other, and they do this." _____, "Deirdre, I don't do those things, and I'm black." "Oh, Miss Duncan, they're not talking about you." See, because the concept is you aren't one of these people I'm talking about, and so it wasn't the color. So, she didn't see the color, she just saw a group of people who did these things, and probably _____ her parents _____, "Black folk do this and black folk do that," but children don't see color, and I didn't see color when I taught my class. I saw children.

LaKevia Perry:

How was the integration among the teachers? How did that go off?

Earline Duncan:

They were cordial. I mean you had those who had their differences, like you do right now, you know?

[0:23:02]

You still have people who have their differences, and still have their **annoyances** that they carry with them around like purses, but I've never been the kind of person that ever let what other people think of me bother me. I always was concerned what I thought of you, rather than what you think of me.

Bryson Whitney:

You mentioned you had children, and did they attend Memphis city schools, as well?

Earline Duncan:

Yep.

Bryson Whitney:

What schools did they go to?

Earline Duncan:

My daughter went to Snowden from fourth to ninth grade, and my sister that I had, she went to Central for high school. Well, she had gone to an all-black school from first to ninth grade, and then for tenth, eleventh and twelfth, she went to Central.

Bryson Whitney:

Okay, so your daughter went to Snowden?

Earline Duncan:

Mm hmm.

Bryson Whitney: Were you ever her teacher at all?

Earline Duncan: Oh, no.

Bryson Whitney: No?

[0:24:00]

Earline Duncan: She didn't even tell folks that – she would talk about me when the other children would talk about me so _____, "Miss Duncan is mean." "She sure is."

Bryson Whitney: Was it your decision to put her in Snowden, or –

Earline Duncan: No, her father's. Not mine.

Bryson Whitney: Okay. Snowden has a really good reputation to this day. Since you've known it, has it always been –

Earline Duncan: _____ good school. I think it was even better. I do. I really do. I think it was better than it is now, but that's just me.

Bryson Whitney: What do you think has made it like the premier school that it is in our community?

Earline Duncan: To start with, when I first was transferred to Snowden, you always had people in the community who were interested in education. One thing about the parents in this community, education was a high priority for them.

[0:25:05]

And so with that being the case, then education was a high priority for their children, and so with that kind of community background, that you just had a good school system – actually, the parents were very helpful. The parents would come in and just do things, whereas you have teachers' aides. See, we didn't have teachers' aides. We had parents who would set up a schedule and come and do things for the teachers, and then, most times we had principals who were on that same wavelength, and so you had a good combination of parents and teachers and children, and everybody working with the same goal, with education being the focus.

Bryson Whitney: Was the PTA, was that –

Earline Duncan: The PTA was very involved.

Bryson Whitney: That's interesting. So, Snowden and the **Evergreen** neighborhood, in general, just had a really active –

[0:26:01]

Earline Duncan: Mm hmm, and, at that time, it was both Snowden and **Valentine**, because Valentine, and like I told you, I can't remember years, but sometime in this timeframe, they made Snowden four through nine, and Valentine was K through three. So, you had these children, who had been at Snowden from one through nine, had to go to Valentine for K through three, and then, once they were out of the third grade, then they came back to Snowden for fourth grade. You had the community called the Valentine/Evergreen community, and they still have that organization. I think they call it **Becca** –

Bryson Whitney: That's right.

Earline Duncan: – and they still work for the good of the community. I have always said this was one of the most integrated communities in America, and there were people who actually worked together to be sure that things were taken and they were done well, and so it really was a good meeting of the minds.

[0:27:01]

The people decided, and it wasn't a matter of the government deciding. Once it was given, the people decided, "Well, we're going to do this like human beings," and they really done a good job of it. Hats off to them for that.

Bryson Whitney: They're still very active to this day.

Earline Duncan: Very active.

Bryson Whitney: Do you remember any of the names of people that stand out in your head that were active in Snowden, in the school, that were parents or residents who were active in the Evergreen neighborhood or the –

Earline Duncan: I remember family names. The **Richmond's**, the **Reisler's**, the **Robison's**, the **Taylor's**, let's see. Some others? Oh, there's a lot of them. I think the **Duncan-Williams'**. Oh, shoot, the little redhead girl? The **Golden's**, across the street. So, there's just _____ of them.

[0:28:01]

Bryson Whitney: Snowden school, how has it changed, in your opinion, or have there been changes?

- Earline Duncan:* I don't know. I retired in '99. I have a church member who is a secretary at Snowden here, and she says it's still good. I say it's still good. I'm just being facetious when I say it was better.
- Bryson Whitney:* Weren't most of the students who attended the school, because we want to get as much information as possible –
- Earline Duncan:* Oh, they came from all over.
- Bryson Whitney:* All over?
- Earline Duncan:* Simply because they started – believe it or not, the optional school program, “An option for everyone,” that was the motto that they used, we created that slogan at Snowden –
- Bryson Whitney:* Really?
- Earline Duncan:* – because at Snowden, we would say an option for everyone was at Snowden, because we had all kinds of classes. We had classes for slow students, classes for the middle and the average student, classes for the top students.
- [0:29:03] Even before they started the optional program in the city of Memphis, we had those things at Snowden, and so they just kind of stole our motto for the optional program, and Snowden was not one of the original optional schools. **Bellevue** was. But, because Bellevue was, again, parents said, “Oh, no. If Bellevue is one, we want to be one, too,” so they made it an optional school, and students could do the same as the parents do now, transfer into an optional school, so you had students from all over. Another thing about it, it was kind of interesting because you had a lot of different nationalities. You had a Jewish community – see, at one time, **Baron Hertz** _____ was right over here on _____ which was a Jewish synagogue, and so you had Jewish children, you had regular old, as we call, white folk, and then you had Italian children.
- [0:30:03] I mean, children who brought their cultures into the school, so it was just really a good melting pot, for both students and teachers. See, when I first went, the principal was Italian.
- Bryson Whitney:* Who was the principal –
- Earline Duncan:* When I went?
- Bryson Whitney:* – while you were –
- Earline Duncan:* It was **Frank Perino**.

Bryson Whitney: How do you spell –

Earline Duncan: Oh, I had a lot of them. I wore principals out. Yeah, I had a lot of them. Frank Perino, Don Coffee, Joe Taylor, Ronnie Banham, Archie. Let's see. Did I name them all? I think I did. I left with a lady called Carolyn Pittman. I shared my reason with her, but I won't share it with the –

Bryson Whitney: That's fine. You mentioned how Snowden had the option for everyone.

[0:31:04]

Earline Duncan: Mm hmm.

Bryson Whitney: Was that a vision that was put in place by a principal or –

Earline Duncan: Oh, no, by the faculty itself, just the faculty itself, you know. We just kind of worked together. The first year that I went there, there was a little lady named Mrs. Kurt. Her name was Janine Kurt, and she was new and I was new. We were both in the sixth grade. So, we decided that, if they would let us, we would departmentalize, and we went and asked Mr. Perino. He didn't know us from Adam's housecat, and we went and asked him could we departmentalize. He said, "You gonna make it work?" and we said, "Sure." So, that's what we did. She liked social studies, I detest social studies and I like language arts, so we decided that she liked social studies and I liked – and Miss Stoval, bless her sweet heart – forgive us – but we just told her she had to teach math.

[0:32:00]

Bryson Whitney: Math is my least favorite subject.

Earline Duncan: Huh?

Bryson Whitney: Math is my least favorite subject.

Earline Duncan: Oh, one year, in the departmentalization, we had a lady who came – you know, over the years it changes around – and I had to teach math, and some of the kids would come up and say, "Miss Duncan, we can't believe you're teaching math," and I said, "Well, I can teach math."

Bryson Whitney: That's a great point, and I'm sure you all were looked at as a model school, I guess, in the Memphis city schools, with all those different programs and options for the students.

Earline Duncan: I don't know whether we were necessarily looked at as a model school. It was just looked at as a good school.

Bryson Whitney: A good school? Okay.

Earline Duncan: We weren't trying to set up any models for anybody to follow. We just wanted to do good things for our children. That may be a little selfish, but it's true.

Bryson Whitney: That's great. You sound like a great teacher.

[0:33:00]

Earline Duncan: Well, I don't know about a great teacher. I tried to give it my best. I enjoyed it when I was doing it. I don't think I would enjoy it today.

Bryson Whitney: Why not?

Earline Duncan: The children are different.

LaKevia Perry: How so?

Earline Duncan: Well, I like discipline. I do like discipline, and the reason I know that they're different, I had to give up children's church at church because of the discipline, and need I say more? We'll leave it at that.

Bryson Whitney: Okay.

LaKevia Perry: Is there any advice that you would give to younger Memphians today?

Bryson Whitney: Oh, I guess the one thing I would like to tell all the kids – please, please, please get an education. I don't know what has happened.

[0:34:00]

I mean I just see evidence of it. I mean I see evidence of it in college graduates, where these people have graduated from college, and now I'm wondering what did they do because I see so much, and I see so much inefficiency in our society, and I just want to say, "What happened to us?" Whatever you do, have pride in what you do. I still work _____. I do the cards, the Hallmark cards at the Walgreen's store in my neighborhood, and I love my work. I mean I love all of my cards. I mean, I like to see my work done well, and so whatever you do, do it well. I don't care what you're doing. But it seems that people just don't take pride in their work. I don't care what it is. I don't care if you're the sanitation engineer, make sure that the street that you go down,

all your garbage cans are picked up, and just take pride in your work.

[0:35:06]

I guess maybe not get an education so much as take pride in whatever they do. I don't know. I guess _____ have so much to learn so quickly, that maybe **that's the reason you just** overshadow some things. When I was growing up, there was such a thing as educating the whole child. We had to have a little bit of everything. I guess my liberal arts education kind of did that to me. And so, people now have departmentalized so well that if they – I'll give you a good example of what I'm talking about. My little doctor, bless his sweet heart – I won't call his name because I love him to death – and I was telling him that I had gone to a play and _____ and he said, "Oh, Miss Duncan, I just don't have time to do that kind of stuff."

[0:36:00]

I said, "Why? Why not?" "Oh, I'm gonna take time. I'm gonna take time." I mean, what's wrong with – you know, they just get tunnel vision and they can't see anywhere beyond their blinders down their little fields, and so we have people who are in computing and they don't know a thing about music. We have people in music who don't know a thing about language. We have people in language who don't know art. I mean, what happened to being completely educated to the point that you could enjoy the whole culture, that you could just enjoy it all, rather than just being so tunnel vision. I don't know what I'm saying, but I guess, to me, the education of the whole, it was more than just the professionalism, that education means more than just what I can do to make a living, but it means living, and I think that we have just gotten so tied up in making our living that we don't have time to live.

[0:37:01]

LaKevia Perry:

Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Earline Duncan:

Oh, no. I don't know anything _____. We'd probably talk all day if you asked me.

Bryson Whitney:

That was a very –

LaKevia Perry:

Well, thank you for participating in our Crossroads to Freedom interview.

Earline Duncan:

Well, I hope I've added something to your program. I don't know what, but –

Bryson Whitney: Well –

Earline Duncan: – just hope you can use some of it, anyway.

Bryson Whitney: Well, your stories and advice I'm sure will be helpful to students that access the Web site, and your interview will be available online at www.crossroadstofreedom.org.

Earline Duncan: Would it surprise you that I don't like computers? I only looked at it because **Holly** told me. She said, "You can look and see where it is," and I looked and I saw Mose Yvonne Walker, I believe – it was Brooks. She's Brooks, Mose Yvonne Brooks. I saw her, and I saw somebody else. Dr. Smith. Wasn't Dr. Smith on there?

[0:38:06]

Bryson Whitney: Mm hmm.

Earline Duncan: _____?

LaKevia Perry: Mm hmm.

Earline Duncan: I looked on there and saw something. I didn't go into the detail –

[End of Audio]