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Arilla Miller, 2008

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Janeese Richey: So could you state your name for the record?

Arilla Miller: Arilla Miller.

Janeese Richey: Okay. And where were you born and raised?

Arilla Miller: ___ Evansville, Mississippi.

Janeese Richey: Okay. What was your occupation?

Arilla Miller: What was my occupation there?

Janeese Richey: Yes, ma'am.

Arilla Miller: Sewing.

Janeese Richey: So you were a seamstress?

Arilla Miller: Mm-hmm.

Janeese Richey: Okay.

Arilla Miller: Yes.

Janeese Richey: Who are your parents?

Arilla Miller: Eva and Willie Alexander.

Janeese Richey: Okay. What were their occupations?

Arilla Miller: Oh, my mother's was sewing, my father's was doing agricultural work. Farmer.

Janeese Richey: Okay. Could you talk a little bit about your parents, and what were they like?

Arilla Miller: My parents was – they was loving parents, and they tried to raise me and directed me in the right direction of life.

[0:01:02]

Arilla Miller: I also was based in a Christian home. And we had to go to church every Sunday. Whatever's going on in church, we had to go there and had to be there. As I told you awhile ago, my mother kept me in church so much that I said, when I get grown, I'm not going, but I'm still with the church. And they – they done the best they could

for, you know, parents back in those days. It wasn't like it is now. But our lives was more comfortable then than it is now. And so I really enjoyed my childhood life.

Janeese Richey: You say your life is more comfortable – it was more comfortable then than it was now. How so?

Arilla Miller: Well, I think when ____ ____ killings sort of going on then than it is now. People seemed to be more loving and caring about one another when I was a child coming up than they do now.

[0:02:04]

Arilla Miller: It's now, you know, most youngsters and some grownups, to, they don't have too much respect for anybody, their parents or anyone else. And so that's the reason I say my life – life was more comfortable then than it was now. We wasn't – we wasn't afraid to walk out in the neighborhood. We wasn't afraid to sit on the porch at night. Wasn't afraid to walk out anywhere at night. And now you have to be so careful, and as careful as you can, you're not careful enough.

Janeese Richey: Oh, well, did you have any brothers or sisters?

Arilla Miller: I had one brother and one sister.

Janeese Richey: What are their names, and what were they like?

Arilla Miller: Willie Frank Alexander Jr. and **Hattie** ____ Alexander.

Janeese Richey: And what were they like?

Arilla Miller: They what?

[0:02:57]

Janeese Richey: What were your brothers and sisters like?

Arilla Miller: What were they like?

Janeese Richey: Yes, ma'am.

Arilla Miller: Well, they was – we was raised up – my brother and sister, they were my half brother and my sister. My sister and brother was my father's children. My mother only had one child, and that was me. And they were normal children. They were normal children. They

didn't get into anything bad or nothing like that. And they was told to go to the church and do the thing that was right, and treat people right. They really taught us to treat people like they would like to be treated. And so they've never given any trouble. They were good kids.

Janeese Richey: All right. Were you involved in any types of activities when you were younger?

Arilla Miller: Yeah. Baseball and basketball.

Janeese Richey: Really?

Arilla Miller: Yeah.

Janeese Richey: Could you talk a little bit about that?

[0:03:54]

Arilla Miller: Well, yes. I think I liked the baseball better than I did the basketball, because I was a little tomboyish when I was younger. And I liked playing baseball. I liked playing baseball, and I was always what they call a **hind** catcher, just by the bat, to catch the ball and throw it. I just enjoyed the baseball better.

Janeese Richey: Was it like a school team, or a neighborhood team?

Arilla Miller: School team.

Janeese Richey: Oh, okay.

Arilla Miller: Mm-hmm.

Janeese Richey: Where did you go to school?

Arilla Miller: Say what?

Janeese Richey: Where did you go to school?

Arilla Miller: I went to school at Evansville, Mississippi.

Janeese Richey: Okay. What was school like for you?

Arilla Miller: What?

Janeese Richey: What was school like for you?

Arilla Miller: Well, I enjoyed school. I enjoyed school. At that particular time, when I was a little girl, we didn't have many months going to school as they do – as the children have now.

[0:05:00]

Arilla Miller: Education wasn't like it is now. And so what we had, I just accepted that, and done the best I could with what we had, because we lived kind of in the country like, and at that particular time, school was only five months. You'd go in the winter, school was five months. You didn't have nine months schooling like the children have now.

Janeese Richey: When you were in school, did any type of, you know, integration take place while you were attending?

Arilla Miller: No. No. I didn't have any of that. No. No.

Janeese Richey: So everything was segregated?

Arilla Miller: Everybody – everything was just _____.

Janeese Richey: Okay. You said that you lived in a Christian home, and religion played a huge life – I mean, a huge part in your life. Could you just talk a little bit more about that?

[0:05:56]

Arilla Miller: About the Christianity?

Janeese Richey: Yes, ma'am. About how religion played a part in your life.

Arilla Miller: Well, religion played a great part in my life. I remember when I first professed religion, I was 13 years old when I come to Christ. And I had – we had the revival at that time. We was having revival, ten days, and five days this week, five days next week. And I remember that I had went to what we call was the **mourner's** bench when I was a child. You sit on the front seat, and the Christians would come around, and they would pray for you. And they would pat you on the back, and they would tell you what to say, and how to come to Christ. And then they would tell, you know, to pray. But they would tell you that you have a meaning in your prayer. You just didn't say it to say a prayer.

[0:06:59]

Arilla Miller: You meant what you was praying about. And I enjoyed that, but looked like that I wasn't going to make it through them ten days. And I just was – I remember on that Wednesday, I just went to praying so hard that the Lord would convert my soul and save my soul, that I would serve him the balance of my days. And looked like close to the closing of the revival, the – it looked like I was getting closer with the Lord.

And so I never will forget it. It was on Friday, around 11:00, when I found Jesus. And I was happy, and ____ been happy ever since. And the older I get, the closer I get to the Lord.

Janeese Richey: Okay.

Arilla Miller: Because he has blessed me in so many ways. In fact, the Lord has blessed me all the ways. He's blessed me to be 94 years old my last birthday, and I thank God for that.

[0:07:59]

Arilla Miller: That I can still cook, I can still wash, I can still do things for myself. I don't have to have a walking cane. And so I'm just thankful to be living still in the presence of the Lord.

Janeese Richey: That's wonderful. Did you have any role models growing up? Any people that you looked up to?

Arilla Miller: Not really. Not really. Not really. Not – no. Not – no, I really didn't. I always – I always felt like that if I was studying, pay attention, that I could be my own role model. And so I'm still like that. I don't follow people too much, because sometimes you follow people, they lead you the wrong way. And you have to – you just have to ____ for yourself.

[0:08:58]

Janeese Richey: What college did you attend?

Arilla Miller: I did not.

Janeese Richey: You didn't go to college?

Arilla Miller: No.

Janeese Richey: Okay. Did you experience any issues pertaining to race or discrimination?

Arilla Miller: You said did I experience them?

Janeese Richey: Yes, ma'am.

Arilla Miller: Yes, I did.

Janeese Richey: Could you elaborate on those?

Arilla Miller: No, I don't mind, you know, because in the time that I was coming up, the black had to look up to whites. They – and at that particular time, they thought they couldn't make it unless ____ the white man said, or white lady said. And I've always kind of wondered about this, and I always kind of felt like that we'll come out from under that, because I strongly believe in Christ, and I read the Bible a lot, and I always paid attention to the scriptures, said, well, before the end of time, the bottom rail would come to the top.

[0:10:04]

Arilla Miller: And the top would go to the bottom. And so I followed that all my life, and I still have watched that. But at the time that I was coming up, the black had to look up to the white. But I felt that one day that God was going to change that. I knew in due time that he would change it. And I'm thankful that he is – he has let me live long enough to see that the top rail is coming up, and the bottom rail is going down. I mean, the top – the bottom rail is coming up and the top rail is going down.

And ____ God has no **respect of** person. It's – we is the one that always ____ the difference in white and black.

[0:10:59]

Arilla Miller: To me, people are just people, regardless of what color. And if he made all colors, and all of us was black, and all of us was white, we wouldn't have a beautiful world. But the way we're mixed up, it's a beautiful world, the black and the white. We're beautiful together.

And I always believed that time was going to do better, and I'm thankful that he spared me to see that it is getting better, because people are just people. If I cut my hand and he cut his hand, we're going to both bleed red blood. It's no difference in the blood, and

it's no different than the blood of Jesus. His blood was red, and he shed his blood for all of us. He didn't shed it for black or white. He shed it his blood for his children, and we all are God's children, regardless of what creed or color that you are.

[0:12:04]

Janeese Richey: Are there any stories that – in particular that stick out in your mind about, you know, the discrimination that you experienced, that you would like to share?

Arilla Miller: Say what?

Janeese Richey: Any stories in particular that stick out in your mind that you remember about discrimination that you would like to share with us?

Arilla Miller: Well, no. I would like to share Martin Luther King's ____ what he left on record for –

Janeese Richey: Okay.

Arilla Miller: ____ you remember that he said that one day we'd go to the top. And I see a lot of Martin Luther King's stories is coming true. Because he – you remember he said in one of his sermons that the little black children, little white children, would be playing together.

[0:12:56]

Arilla Miller: And loving one another. And then you see it. It's here now. The dreamer is gone, but the dreams still live.

Janeese Richey: It's true.

Eric Neimeyer: Speaking of Dr. King, what are your recollections of the Civil Rights Movement?

Arilla Miller: Well, I remember when Dr. King used to come here and hold meetings, and he was trying to bring the black and the white together, the rich and the poor together. I remember that. And I remember one sermon that he did preach, he said that he wouldn't reach the top, but we would. And he said, we are coming to the top.

[0:13:58]

Arilla Miller: And he didn't mean that – he didn't mean the black or white. He meant the rich and poor. That's what he meant. That the poor people would be able to come to the top. And he was always conscious that he wouldn't live. He felt his death. I do believe he always felt that he would never reach the top himself, if he was the dreamer, but his dream would reach the top.

And so we are still living with Martin Luther King today. He's gone. He's the dreamer. But his dreams is still existing.

Eric Neimeyer: Where did you live during that period? Where did you live during the Civil Rights Movement?

Arilla Miller: Here.

Eric Neimeyer: Here? In the Hollywood Springdale area?

Arilla Miller: Yeah.

Eric Neimeyer: How – do you think that the Civil Rights Movement had any affect on the Hollywood Springdale neighborhood?

[0:15:00]

Arilla Miller: Well, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I guess so. Yeah. Yeah. I think it had some. It's a slow movement, but you can gradually see some of it happening.

Eric Neimeyer: During the Civil Rights Movement, were you – were you involved in the movement personally? Or did you see people around you getting involved?

Arilla Miller: I saw people around me getting involved. But I wasn't actually in it myself, but I seen people that was, you know, involved. But I was in agreement with everything he said.

Eric Neimeyer: Did you see – like for you personally, was there conflict about the Civil Rights Movement and conflict about Dr. King?

[0:16:03]

Eric Neimeyer: Or did you just believe in everything that Dr. King believed in?

Arilla Miller: No. As far as Dr. King, as far as I'm concerned about Dr. King, he was most ____ white people was against Dr. King. Definitely I

could see that, it was mostly against Dr. King, because as – a lot of whites did not want to see the poor people come up. And there's still some of that is existing now, but it's not as strong as it was, but there's still some of it out there now.

Eric Neimeyer: Speaking of the poor people coming up, did you have – do you have any memories of the sanitation strike?

Arilla Miller: Mm-hmm.

[0:16:59]

Eric Neimeyer: During the '60s?

Arilla Miller: Yeah. Yeah. I remember the Civil Rights Movement. I remember the sanitation strike, what they had had such a hard time. They was fighting. And I don't – yeah. They was fighting, and closing doors, and there was lots of things that wasn't very good. But the ____ was showing that the whites was still trying to keep the poor people down. It wasn't all of them, but it was some of them. It was ___ – some of it, just like I said a few minutes ago, some of it's still existing.

Janeese Richey: Well, you're kind of saying that during – between the '50s and the '70s, that whites were more focused about keeping the poor people down?

[0:17:57]

Janeese Richey: Do you think that they were more focused on the poor people rather than race?

Arilla Miller: Say do I think what?

Janeese Richey: Do you think that they were more against the poor people coming up, or just blacks in general?

Arilla Miller: It – it was not – I wouldn't say it was just black in general. I would say the poor people.

Janeese Richey: So they were just more focused on not seeing the –

Arilla Miller: Mm-hmm.

Janeese Richey: – poor rise to the top?

Arilla Miller: ____ just seeing the poor rise.

Janeese Richey: So you think that poverty was a bigger issue than race during that time?

Arilla Miller: Mm-hmm. I really do.

Janeese Richey: Okay. Well, do you think like much has changed from that period to now?

Arilla Miller: Yes. It's – yes. Some of it's changed. Yes. Yes.

Janeese Richey: In what ways do you think time has changed?

Arilla Miller: Well, I remember when – well, I would start off with the drinking fountains.

[0:19:02]

Arilla Miller: The black couldn't drink out of the fountains, like down at ____ and places like that, they used to have drinking fountains. And they've have colored, white. That mean the black people go to where it said colored, and the white go to the white. And ____ seating on the bus that the black people couldn't sit up front. They had to keep going to the back, I don't care how many seats were up front. They were – you didn't sit up there. I remember that.

And – and the eating places. You couldn't go in there, in certain places. You had to – and I have seen them hand food out the window. You couldn't go inside and eat, but you – they'd hand it out the window to you, and you paid the same price at the window as seated inside.

[0:20:06]

Arilla Miller: I remember that.

Janeese Richey: Do you feel like there's some things that haven't changed since that time?

Arilla Miller: Since – do I do what?

Janeese Richey: Do you believe that there are some things that haven't changed since that time?

Arilla Miller: Well, yeah. The feelings of some – the feelings of – some people have still got the same _____. They don't – they try to keep it hid, but it's – some of it is still there.

Janeese Richey: Okay. And you feel like some people still have those racist beliefs, or that they haven't gone away?

Arilla Miller: Mm-hmm. Sure.

Janeese Richey: Is there any advice you would like to leave or give to my people age about life in general?

[0:20:58]

Arilla Miller: Yes, I would. May I ask you, how old are you?

Janeese Richey: I'm 17.

Arilla Miller: You're 17?

Janeese Richey: Yes, ma'am.

Arilla Miller: Yeah. And you're right at an age that you do need some advice.

Janeese Richey: Yes, ma'am.

Arilla Miller: It's a different – the raising of children now than it was when my _____ even when **Eric** was a child. Yeah. It's different between _____ when Eric was raised up. If he got out there and done anything wrong, he was – know he was going to get a spanking when he got home, because Miss **Amy** was going to tell it. I can remember also when he was a little boy, and we lived on _____ here, Eric was – Eric was always quiet, but he was mischievous.

[0:21:58]

Arilla Miller: And _____ he come through the yard running, and somebody said, "Boy, what you running for?" "I'm going to get in here because Old Lady Frasier setting across the street over there, she don't do nothing but just watch over her house, and she _____ call my mama and tell a lot of lies." I knew _____ when you said that.

And see, now you can't talk to people about that, too. If you see some young lady, maybe I see you doing something wrong, I call you and talk to you, well, I just may get cursed out. And if I go tell

the parents, they're going to turn around and ask you did you do it, and if you said no – I had this to happen to me. Well, I didn't think you did. Well, you done called me a false.

[0:22:56]

Arilla Miller: And I know I'm telling the truth. And if – different parents were allowed to talk more to the young people, and I think we need to put in more time with you all than we do. And then I think you all need to listen better than you do, too. So it's a fault on both sides of the fence. And we should add some programs or some activities that you'd be interested in to make you come, a nice, young, intelligent, young Christian lady. You should be taught to go to church, and not only go to church just to say you went to church. Go to church for what's in it for you, and that is the Holy Spirit.

And so it's a lot of – it's a lot that we owe you all, and then you all owe us a lot of respect. But we should live in a way that you will respect us.

[0:23:58]

Arilla Miller: They can't get out there and do whatever you all are doing, and ____ get out there with you, and then trying to give you advice. I can't do that, because you're not going to pay me any attention. You say, well, ____ with me, she would have done so and so and so and so. Now what can she tell me? And so it's something on both hands.

Janeese Richey: Well, we just want to thank you, Ms. Miller, for taking your time out – taking time out of your day to share your story with us. And we just really appreciate it, and we want to thank you. That's all we have.

Arilla Miller: Well, you're just welcome. And any help that I can be, I'm here for this neighborhood. I've lived in this neighborhood about 43 years, and everybody in this whole neighborhood mostly knows – now where did you all get my name from?

Janeese Richey: I think somebody referred you.

Eric Neimeyer: Dorothy Cox.

Arilla Miller: What?

Eric Neimeyer: From Dorothy Cox. Right?

Janeese Richey: Dorothy Cox.

[0:24:58]

Arilla Miller: Oh, yeah. Okay. Over on **Shasta**. Mm-hmm. Okay. Okay. And I've been a pillar of the neighborhood for the last 50 years. And I was ___ the neighborhood. I was in the organizing of the Neighborhood Watch.

Janeese Richey: Really?

Arilla Miller: Yeah. One of the senior members of the Neighborhood Watch.

Janeese Richey: Is that still going strong?

Arilla Miller: Yeah.

Janeese Richey: That's good.

Arilla Miller: Well, not too strong, but we're going.

Janeese Richey: Okay.

Arilla Miller: Mm-hmm. I never have let mine drop.

Janeese Richey: Okay.

Eric Neimeyer: She had an aneurysm four years ago.

Arilla Miller: Say what, darling?

Eric Neimeyer: I was telling about the aneurysm that you had when you was in the hospital.

Arilla Miller: Oh.

Eric Neimeyer: And the doctor told her that – well, she told – well, the doctor told us, children and grandkids, y'all going to have to ___ ___, that she was in such a way that she had to come home and be ___ hospice or we had to put her in a nursing home.

[0:25:59]

Eric Neimeyer: We said, no, we're going to bring her home. And that was four years ago. She's still here.

Janeese Richey: Well, it's wonderful to see you here –

Arilla Miller: That was four years ago.

Janeese Richey: – and moving around, and up and going. It's wonderful to see that.

Eric Neimeyer: No hospice.

Janeese Richey: That's very ____.

Arilla Miller: And any help I can be to you all, just let me know.

Janeese Richey: Yes, ma'am.

Eric Neimeyer: Thank you so much.

Janeese Richey: Thank you.

[End of Audio]