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Mrs. Frances Brown: So tell me your names again.

Holly McGlown: Holly.

Mrs. Frances Brown: Huh?

Holly McGlown: Holly.

Mrs. Frances Brown: Holly?

Holly McGlown: Yes ma'am.

Mrs. Frances Brown: H-O-L-L-Y? Holly.

Holly McGlown: Yes ma'am.

Bryson Whitney: Bryson.

Mrs. Frances Brown: Bry-

Bryson Whitney: Bryson.

Mrs. Frances Brown: Bryson? B-R-I-S-O-N.

Bryson Whitney: B-R-Y-S-O-N

Mrs. Frances Brown: B-R-Y. Oh. Bryson.

Bryson Whitney: Yes ma'am. Okay.

Holly McGlown: Are you still recording? Okay.

Bryson Whitney: Okay, good. It says record. Okay.

Holly McGlown: We're gonna start the interview now. So I'm just gonna say a little introduction and then we'll start asking questions.

Mrs. Frances Brown: Now see, I did not hear you.

Holly McGlown: We're gonna –

Mrs. Frances Brown: You're just gonna have to talk louder.

Holly McGlown: We're gonna start the interview now.

Mrs. Frances Brown: All right.

Holly McGlown: So I'm just gonna say an introduction and then we're gonna start asking you questions.

Mrs. Frances Brown: All right.

Holly McGlown: Okay. On behalf of Crossroads to Freedom at Rhodes College, we want to thank you for coming here today and sharing your story with us.

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We really appreciate it. My name is Holly McGlown. I'm a sophomore at Rhodes College and this is Bryson Whitney. He's a senior at Vanderbilt. We're both honored for you to be here and to find out a little bit more about Memphis and Evergreen community. Today's interview will be available online at www.crossroadstofreedom.org. Okay, let's start off with a little background information. Can you state your name, please?

Mrs. Frances Brown: Frances Williams Brown.

Holly McGlown: When were you born?

Mrs. Frances Brown: I was born April the 28th, 1913.

Holly McGlown: Where were you born and raised?

Mrs. Frances Brown: In Memphis, Tennessee. I'm a real Memphian and so was my mother before me. So –

Holly McGlown: What is your occupation?

Mrs. Frances Brown: Well, I studied to be a secretary and after I graduated from high school, I worked in the business world for a while. Then, when I married, I quit and stayed at home

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to have my family. So I've just – being a mother is the best job you can have.

Holly McGlown: Who are your parents?

Mrs. Frances Brown: My father was John P. Williams and he was from Grenada, Mississippi. My mother was named Willie Firth, F-I-R-T-H and she was born here in Memphis, too. So –

Holly McGlown: Can you tell us what their occupations were?

Mrs. Frances Brown: I didn't hear you.

Holly McGlown: Can you tell us what their occupations were?

Mrs. Frances Brown: Well, being' a mother was my mother's occupation. My father sold lumber and so he traveled some time to different places

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mostly Asheville, North Carolina. So that was his base but he sold – not retail but wholesale – lumber.

Holly McGlown: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Mrs. Frances Brown: I had two sisters and one brother.

Holly McGlown: Can you tell us a little bit about them?

Mrs. Frances Brown: Well, let's see. My oldest sister was Margaret Williams Hightower and she was a graduate of Rhodes College, then called Southwestern. My sister Carolyn Parrish was an accountant and she was quite accepted in her profession, in fact. She was President of the Memphis Accountants and

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and then she was President of the Tennessee Accountants. So she had no children – she spent all of her life figuring out things [Laughter] with figures and things. My brother worked at Union Planters Bank. When we finished high school, it was depression time, so only my oldest sister went to college and she borrowed money all the way. But anyway, she was proud of her years at Southwestern. And then my brother worked at Firestone 'til the war and then he went into the service. He went overseas. He had to do with keeping the ammunitions moving, so he was never on the

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front line but he served over there 'til after the war.

Holly McGlown: Can you talk about what your neighborhood was like when you were growing up?

Mrs. Frances Brown: Well I moved down on Beard Street in 1927. Beard Street, if you knew it, was the first street north of Poplar, west of Evergreen. It was a dead-end street 'cause there was a ditch down at the – that's the best place to live, on a dead-end street. There wasn't any traffic. We played baseball in the street. We knew all the neighbors and all the neighbors knew us and the only disadvantage was how far it was from Snowden School. That's where we went to school and I tell you, in the winter it was cold walking and in the su- *[Laughter]*

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up in the spring and early summer it was hot. But anyway, we loved it and we went to Snowden.

[00:06:11]

Bryson Whitney: What was your address on Beard Street?

Mrs. Frances Brown: The address?

Bryson Whitney: Yes ma'am.

Mrs. Frances Brown: 1676 –

Bryson Whitney: Okay.

Mrs. Frances Brown: - Beard Place and I don't know who thought up Beard Place but it was – it suited us just fine.

Bryson Whitney: And you moved there in 1927?

Mrs. Frances Brown: I did not hear you.

Bryson Whitney: You moved there in 1927?

Mrs. Frances Brown: Oh, we lived there a long time.

Bryson Whitney: Okay.

Mrs. Frances Brown: 'Til the Depression and then we lost it, like a lot of people did, and since then we've been renters.

Holly McGlown: What kinds of activities were you involved in when you were younger?

Mrs. Frances Brown: You mean elementary school times and –

Holly McGlown: Just all your ____ time.

Mrs. Frances Brown: - high school?

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Well most of it was just lookers. Just – we watched the boys play football. We watched them practice football and they – all the games were played over there behind Central High School and we were good boosters. I don't remember that the girls had any organized sports but we supported the boys.

Holly McGlown: Where did you go to elementary school?

Mrs. Frances Brown: Well Snowden. I went to Snowden from the fifth grade. Now we lived in South Memphis prior to that and I went to Cummings School for the first four years and then I went to Snowden beginning with the fifth and that was the time when they

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added junior highs. Up until that time, you know, it was grade one through grade eight and I was in the first class that was junior high, it's seventh, eighth and ninth and that was in 1927, I guess. I finished in '27.

Bryson Whitney: I had a question. Moving from your South Memphis neighborhood and the Cummings School and then moving up to the Evergreen neighborhood and going to Snowden – was there any differences you noticed in the neighborhood, ____ ____ that you can remember that you noticed like from moving to the different neighborhoods across Memphis?

Mrs. Frances Brown: Well we were happy. We lived on Mississippi, right across from a field and there was a good place to play. It was a good distance from Cummings School, too. We always teased my mother and said she moved just

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barely into the boundary and we had to walk the – and we walked.
[Laughter] We didn't have a car and walking was good for us, I guess 'cause here I am, still around.

[Laughter]

Holly McGlown: Where did you attend high school?

Mrs. Frances Brown: I went to Central and I walked from my house to Central, too.

Bryson Whitney: Wow.

Mrs. Frances Brown: But then that was fun, because we would walk with girlfriends or boyfriends and so – and we'd all – there was a bakery on Madison, close to Crosstown – and if we had a nickel, we went in and bought a donut. **Cooney Waddis** Donuts. But I loved school and those were happy days. So –

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Holly McGlown: With the time period that you lived through when you were born, did segregation or integration affect your educational experience?

Mrs. Frances Brown: No. No, it didn't. Now, I was a school secretary at Vollintine School when it was integrated. I was there when we had just one black child. He was from New York. I guess he was just sent in here but he held his own. He was in the second grade and he had a very understanding teacher and it was not fair to him to be the only one. I always thought that was not fair but he did all right. And then in the next two or three years we had a whole lot more black children. But we had a wise principal, Mrs. Epperson, and we never did have a bit of trouble.

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Our children accepted them and they came, as far as I know, without any fear or wondering. So as far as Vollintine School was concerned, it was handled beautifully.

Holly McGlown: As a secretary at Vollintine and there being the Jewish synagogue right there, how do you think that all the students with the different races and religions connected?

Mrs. Frances Brown: Well, I never heard of any – oh I can't even think of the word – and different between the Jewish children and the white children and

the black children. We just learned to live together. You know, the Jewish children have a reputation

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of being very smart and they were smart. We had a lot of – and we had a lot of nice Jewish mothers, too. They cooperated in the school activities and we just got along fine. Of course, part of it was because we had such a wise principal, Mrs. Audrey Epperson, and she ran a good school and we just had a minimum of trouble.

[00:12;38]

Holly McGlown: Can you spell your principal's name, Epperson?

Mrs. Frances Brown: Epperson. E-P-P-E-R-S-O-N.

Holly McGlown: E-P-P-E-R-S-O-N?

Mrs. Frances Brown: Yes, Epperson.

Holly McGlown: What role did religion play in your life while you were growing up?

Mrs. Frances Brown: Well we went to Sunday School from the time before we could walk, I guess.

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[Laughter]

Bryson Whitney: Uh huh.

Mrs. Frances Brown: When we first moved into this neighborhood, we were attending First Methodist Church downtown.

Bryson Whitney: Uh huh.

Mrs. Frances Brown: And so as a family, we got up, caught the streetcar and rode down to First Methodist and then after living here for, well, I guess – I think I was 20 years old when we joined Trinity United Methodist Church, 'cause that's where our friends were going – but as long as my grandmother lived, we went down to First Methodist Church with her. After she died, we felt free to change and we have – as a family – we belonged to Trinity ever since then.

Holly McGlown: How has the Trinity community recuperated

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after the I-40 debacle?

Mrs. Frances Brown: Well, yes, that was a terrible expense and experience for the Evergreen neighborhood. Before they decided not to go through, they tore down so many houses and broke so many hearts. I mean, some families, I really think there were deaths because of the trauma that it caused. But fortunately, they built it back in the same mode as it was before and so Evergreen has survived.

Holly McGlown: Let's talk a little bit about your family. Were you married?

Mrs. Frances Brown: I married the nicest man in Memphis, Tennessee.

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[Laughter]

Another Methodist family – he grew up in Galloway Methodist Church, down at Cooper and what – Walker, Walker and Cooper.

Bryson Whitney: Uh huh.

Mrs. Frances Brown: But anyway, we both were working to help our families. It was during the depression, 1936, 1930, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, so we went together for six years, I think, before we were able to marry and when we married, he joined Trinity Church and so we grew up as a

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family in Trinity Church and he was loved by everyone, not just me.

Holly McGlown: Can you tell us what his name was?

Mrs. Frances Brown: I didn't hear you.

Holly McGlown: Can you tell us what his name was?

Mrs. Frances Brown: His name?

Holly McGlown: Uh huh.

Mrs. Frances Brown: Was William Parson Brown but he was known as Bill Brown. He was one of these fixers. His business – he made a Brown Built Screen and Door company, made –

Bryson Whitney: Where was that located?

Mrs. Frances Brown: - came at a time when people were putting in storm windows and doors and that was his business until he sold it and retired. So many a house has his windows on it.

Bryson Whitney: Was his business located near the Evergreen neighborhood?

Mrs. Frances Brown: Was the business –

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Bryson Whitney: Was it located near Evergreen?

Mrs. Frances Brown: Yes. One place – he was at the corner of Jackson and Evergreen, in that line of stores. He was there for a long time and then he went – he moved to Madison about two doors west of Crosstown. Those were the two places.

Holly McGlown: Can you tell us about your children?

[00:17:28]

Mrs. Frances Brown: Oh, now we're gonna be here a long time.

[Laughter]

I have four children: Beverly, Beverly went through schools here, then two years at Memphis State – that's what it was called then – and then she married and in a short time, her husband was sent to New York. So she lived her early married life

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in Western Connecticut, I guess it'd be Western Connecticut. Then he was transferred to Chicago and she has lived in one of the Chicago suburbs since then. My second daughter, Roberta, went to the city schools and she went to SMU in Dallas for two years; came back to UT because it offered a course in speech pathology. So that was her specialty and she went to Florida for two years after graduation and became a speech pathologist. She married a man that was at the

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space center in Huntsville. She was down there working and so she spent the rest of her life as a speech pathologist in Huntsville. She died of breast cancer at a early age and that was sad but she left one son who is now a lawyer in Birmingham. He went to Birmingham. My third child was a boy and he's been the joy of our lives. He went to UT and married right out of college and he worked for an auction company in Knoxville and that's where he,

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you know, he worked I don't know many years at – really, he went to auctioneer's school and learned how to do some of that doubletalk.

[Laughter]

And now they have at the church he attends, **Coxbury** United Methodist Church in Knoxville, every year they have an auction in the church – just all the members bring their stuff – and so he does the auctioneering. So –

[Laughter]

- and he's happily married with three children and now many grandchildren. My youngest daughter, my fourth child was a girl. We thought we were gonna get a playmate for the boy but – and she ended up being the good, a nice tomboy for him. She went to the schools here

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and in Knoxville but she graduated from UT and she taught school. She taught in Collierville, kindergarten for two or three years and then she was appointed head of the Memphis City Beautiful. So she served, oh I believe it was six years, I'm not sure and then in that capacity, she became connected with the waste management and disposal business. So that Waste Management sent her to, eventually, to Houston and so after she quit that she was

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made head of Leadership Houston and that's where she is now. She's been in Houston ten years. She's not married; she's a career girl and that's my family and they're my joys. My husband died in '93, I guess. He had had open heart surgery in 1980 but he lived

those 11, 12 years just perfectly normal. It was a complete recovery. He was just – but then he died just like that. That's my family. Now don't get me started on my grandchildren –

[Laughter]

- and my great-grandchildren. But anyway, we're a close, loving family.

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Holly McGlown: All right. Now we're gonna talk about the 1950s through the 1970s

Bryson Whitney: Okay. Ms. Frances, living in Memphis and specifically in Evergreen, during the 1950s and '60s and '70s – what was it like back then? Are there any events or –

Mrs. Frances Brown: Well you'll have to go back even farther than that to get a true picture, because it was strictly a neighborhood. We could walk the streets without any fear. We sent our children to Overton Park to play knowing they'd be perfectly all right 'til they got ready to come home and I'm sorry that mothers can't, families can't feel that way now. But it was just a lovely place to be.

Bryson Whitney: Where were you living in Evergreen at this time?

Mrs. Frances Brown: Well now I have already told you when we moved in here

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we're down on Beard.

Bryson Whitney: Oh so you raised your family on Beard as well?

Mrs. Frances Brown: Yes, we were there until after I graduated from high school.

Bryson Whitney: Okay and were your children going to the neighborhood school?

Mrs. Frances Brown: Snowden.

Bryson Whitney: Snowden as well?

Mrs. Frances Brown: Yeah, they were going to Snowden.

Bryson Whitney: Okay.

Mrs. Frances Brown: And there were friends and teachers that were still in Snowden as once, when I went and I'll never remember meeting a neighbor and she said, "Do you still have children in Snowden School?"

[Laughter]

And I was all – Snowden always had a good reputation – reputation as a good school. So it was a privilege to grow up in the Snowden neighborhood.

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Snowden district.

Bryson Whitney: Has Snowden changed much from the time when you were going there –

Mrs. Frances Brown: *[Laughter]*

Bryson Whitney: - as a student 'til when your children went?

Mrs. Frances Brown: I really don't know. Not the looks of it – it looks just the same. Couple of summers ago, they had a community party and invited the neighborhood. I went in just on the floor level, first floor level, so I don't know what it looks like – and I never did know what the principal's office looked like 'cause I never was sent to the principal's office.

[Laughter]

No. But once when my children were going there, I went over and the teacher that came to the door was substituting that day and it was a teacher that I had had. Oh, and I can tell you I took

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something to Beverly she had forgotten and I said, "Miss Sweeney would you please give this to Beverly?" She said, "Yes I will but if you had forgotten it, your mother wouldn't've come traipsing over here to bring it to you."

[Laughter]

So the world is different, isn't it?

Bryson Whitney: Uh huh, yes ma'am.

Mrs. Frances Brown: Okay.

Bryson Whitney: Well, you mentioned that Vollintine at one point had the one African-American student –

Mrs. Frances Brown: Now we – we moved into the Vollintine area when my two younger children were elementary school age and they went all the way through to Vollintine.

Bryson Whitney: Okay.

Mrs. Frances Brown: My older ones were already in junior high, so they never did go to Vollintine because it was a sixth grade school.

Bryson Whitney: Okay.

[0:27:00]

Well, was Snowden at this point – was there an integrated student population at Snowden during this period?

Mrs. Frances Brown: Now please say that again.

Bryson Whitney: At this point, was there an integrated student population?

Mrs. Frances Brown: Well, it happened while I was there. I was there a while before and I was there during the integration and I think I've already explained how well it went.

Bryson Whitney: So it went well at Snowden as well?

Mrs. Frances Brown: Well it's just, you know, it was just handled beautifully. We didn't have any problems.

Bryson Whitney: That's great.

Mrs. Frances Brown: And of course, we – as you mentioned – we also had the Jewish children and one day, of course we respected the Jewish holiday and one day, when a lot of the Jewish children were not at school, one of the gentiles said, "How do you get to be one of those?"

[Laughter]

[0:28:00]

That the holidays were very attractive to many, you know, okay.

Bryson Whitney: Right. So being how the schools seemed to integrate, you know, in a peaceful manner, did you ever have any difficulties having to explain to your children about any of, like, Jim Crow laws or any difficulties talking about different racial problems that may have been exist anywhere else in the city? Was that hard to explain to your children? Or did you have to?

Mrs. Frances Brown: I'm not sure I know where you're going with that question but we lived on North Belvedere, which was north of the park and we had a black family move in next door to us and I went over and called on them, just like I would if it been a white

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person and I think we would have – I think if it'd been just she we would've gotten along fine but you know it wasn't long until one, two, three, four, five young people would gather there and they would not always use good manners in there. So after a while, we moved and so that's all I can say.

[00:29:36]

Bryson Whitney: Okay.

Mrs. Frances Brown: Personally, I had no problem but as a community, it didn't work.

Bryson Whitney: Were you involved in Trinity United Methodist at this time, too? Were you still involved in the church

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with different activities?

Mrs. Frances Brown: Was I involved in training in church?

Bryson Whitney: Oh no, were you involved here at Trinity during this time period as well?

Mrs. Frances Brown: Yeah. All the time from the time we moved in 'til we joined in – what did I say, 19 – we joined in 1930-something. Yes, and of course, as I say, I was already 20, so I took part in the youth department and even before I married I found myself teaching Sunday School. So I have taught from kindergarten to the young people, to the elderly ones. So it's just been my joy

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to study and teach in the school. I don't teach now but I have up until couple of years ago.

Bryson Whitney: Okay.

Mrs. Frances Brown: And I learned because you learn when you teach.

Bryson Whitney: Okay. If you would, could you explain a little bit how the neighborhood has changed – if it has at all – from when you were young –

Mrs. Frances Brown: How Memphis?

Bryson Whitney: - as a child – how the Evergreen neighborhood.

Mrs. Frances Brown: After the – how Evergreen has changed? I don't think it's changed much. We still walk dogs all over [Laughter] you know, it's still a safe place to live and to –

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- of course the normal things is we don't walk as much as we used to. Everybody has a car, it seems like, at least in the Evergreen area, you know, and so – and I don't guess we're as – right now I'm living in the Parkway House. So I can't talk about the neighborhoods, only I think there's certain places – one of my young friends has bought a home up on Forest and she talks about a neighbor that she's become acquainted with. So maybe, people are still neighborly. I just don't know. Now, in the Parkway House, I make it a point to visit the ones I know and to try to meet the ones

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I don't know. Of course there are a lot of families. There are a lot of people there I'll never meet but it's – the ones that I know of are friendly and I can knock on their door and go in and visit a while, you know. So it's very pleasant. Now I hope that's true of the whole neighborhood.

Holly McGlown: What do you remember about working during this period of time, especially like since after the Depression and after all the wars, did people find it easy to find jobs?

Mrs. Frances Brown: Well I – from the time I graduated 'til the time I – from high school – I was out two weeks

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after all – I worked in three different places. I started working at A.R. Taylor Company. We knew the family and so Mr. Taylor gave me a job as a – I had taken typing and shorthand in high school. And then I worked for the Farm Division of the Union Central Life Insurance Company for three or four years and they closed this office and moved to Cincinnati. And I could've moved to Cincinnati but I wanted to stay in Memphis, so I didn't go. But I was out two weeks and then the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company was opening the plant here and so I went out there and was interviewed

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and I was fortunate enough, and I mean fortunate, to be Mr. Raymond Firestone's secretary and I feel like it was the best job in Memphis.

[Laughter]

But it was out, you know, out on Firestone Boulevard and the streetcar wasn't even going out there then. But they did soon extend that line. But just right away, they hired several secretaries and office girls so pretty soon we went in carpools and that was no problem.

Holly McGlown: Do you remember any significant events that happened during the 1950s through the '70s, like the assassination of Martin Luther King?

[00:35:59]

[0:36:00]

Mrs. Frances Brown: Well I remember the night Martin Luther King was killed. My second daughter, Roberta, was in Dallas at SMU and she called me. We had made Maggie, that stayed with two little, small little children in the family, and Roberta called. She said, "Go get Maggie to be sure she'll be all right." And I called her and she said no, she lived down off of – I don't think it was Manassas but it was down off of Jackson, towards town. She said no there was no problem in her neighborhood and she'd be all right. So I was never

exposed to any of the problems of it and I don't think anybody in Evergreen was that I know of.

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Holly McGlown: Do you remember seeing any tanks afterwards?

Mrs. Frances Brown: Any what?

Holly McGlown: Tanks. Like people driving around with tanks in the military – officers in the city?

Mrs. Frances Brown: It's what, hon?

Holly McGlown: Do you remember seeing any tanks or military officers within the city after this happened?

Mrs. Frances Brown: You mean the police?

Holly McGlown: Uh huh.

Mrs. Frances Brown: No. Now that doesn't mean it wasn't there but I don't remember it. I mean I don't think it was poss- I don't think it happened in this neighborhood.

Holly McGlown: Do you remember any significant political rallies –

Mrs. Frances Brown: Political rallies?

Holly McGlown: - in – yes, ma'am.

Mrs. Frances Brown: Ooh. Let me see. I've always voted but I haven't been active

[0:38:00]

in the political world. We've had politicians here at Trinity. You know we have a labor day picnic and last year, Steve Cohen spoke and I guess that's the only time I've ever seen one. Now sometime the Evergreen Historical group meets at our church and I believe Mayor Harrington spoke to 'em one night. I was not present but I think he – but it's a neighborhood that keeps up with the political part

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of it but I – but I don't think to any extra activities connected with it.

Bryson Whitney: Evergreen seems like a neighborhood where the residents are always active and always on top of things, so I was wondering: were you ever involved during the '50s or '60s with the people protesting against the corridor, the Interstate corridor being put in? Were you involved in that at all?

Mrs. Frances Brown: I think that question's already been answered, honey. No. No, I never was and I don't know of anybody in the neighborhood that was but there could be.

Holly McGlown: Well is there anything else that you would like to add to this interview that we haven't asked you about?

Mrs. Frances Brown: *[Laughter]* I've done an awful lot of talking and I thought you
[0:40:00]

were gonna do as much as I was gonna do. So oh, just to sum it up, I know there are other wonderful neighborhoods – Central Gardens for one is a very active neighborhood group – and I'm sure there are others that I don't know about but Evergreen is a mighty nice spot to live in and I suppose if we had a problem, the Evergreen group would be at the head, trying to get it straightened out.

Holly McGlown: Well, we would like to thank you for coming and interviewing with us. We –

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Mrs. Frances Brown: Well, it's just been my joy and I just talked my head off. But I appreciate your interest, not in me, but in the community and I would recommend it to anybody and I love reading the real estate sections when they say that the homeowner prospects were interested in Evergreen and found it a good place to live. So I hope it will always be a good neighborhood.

Holly McGlown: Well we really appreciate it.

Bryson Whitney: Thank you, Ms. Frances.

Mrs. Frances Brown: That's it?

Holly McGlown: Uh huh.

Bryson Whitney: Yes ma'am.

Mrs. Frances Brown: All right. All right. Thank you.

[0:42:00]

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