

Rhodes College Digital Archives - DLynx

Frances Crain, 2010

Item Type	Moving image
Publisher	Rhodes College
Download date	2026-05-19 16:06:41
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/10267/33697

[0:00:00]

Caroline Mulloy: Oh behalf of Crossroads to Freedom at Rhode's College we would like to thank you for coming today and sharing your story with us. Today is July 21st, 2010. My name is **Caroline Mulloy** and this is **Holly McGlown**. We are honored to be conducting this interview and to find out a little bit more about Memphis. Today's interview will be available online at CrossroadsToFreedom.org. So I want to ask you some background information just _____. Can you state your name?

Francis Crain: My name is **Francis Crain**. My maiden name was **Utterback** so that's why it's on the signs on the street.

Caroline Mulloy: When were you born?

Francis Crain: December 28th, 1914.

Caroline Mulloy: Where were you born and raised?

Francis Crain: I was born in Crawfordsville, Indiana.

Caroline Mulloy: What was your occupation?

Francis Crain: My occupation, I'm a retired dietician.

[0:01:00]

Caroline Mulloy: So I want to talk to you a little bit about your experiences growing up. What was your neighborhood like growing up as a child?

Francis Crain: Well from the time I was two till I was ten we lived on a farm in southern Illinois that was developed and the farm was a self-contained operation. I always said from the – romance from the standpoint of adventure because it was the most romantic place I had ever seen. So I was there from the age of two until ten. My father was an education nut. It wasn't that he believed that education was the most important thing. He said it was the only thing that mattered *[laughs]*. So when it reached a point that there were three kids – there were five, five of us all together. I'm the youngest of five.

[0:02:00]

When it reached the point that there were three in the university and two at home we simply moved to the college town. My dad didn't have a job there. We just moved there because that was the place to be *[laughs]*. Then we lived in the college town. I lived

there until I graduated from the University of Illinois and went to Indianapolis for my dietetics internship and worked around in places in the Midwest, Kansas City, St. Louis, so forth until I came to Memphis [laughs].

Caroline Mulloy: So how would you describe your home life when you were growing up?

Francis Crain: Well I've always said that my father was a dreamer and my mother was an achiever [laughs].

[0:03:00] It made a nice combination but it had its problems. I used to wonder if their – the difference in their priorities. My dad was an avid reader and he would say, "I think I will take out a subscription to so and so," and my mother would say, "Well you're already taking the *Manchester Garden*, *The New Republic*, the this, that and the other." He would say, "Well they sometimes have a little different slant on things." So that was his top priority. My mother one time said that she had all her life wanted to have a matched bedroom set and she never had one. I said, "I think you ought to go down and get one." My dad said, "Well we've already got a bed," [laughs] which to me was an example of their priorities.

[0:04:00]

Caroline Mulloy: So what kind of activities were you involved in growing up or when you were in college?

Francis Crain: Well let me tell you a little bit about the farm because it was as I said it was the most romantic place I had ever seen. One of my top stories is that we had a pair – a team of Western ponies, Jim and Dell. Because they were Western ponies they had been branded. Whenever my father would **curry** Jim if he'd got close to that branding scar evidently it was sensitive because Jim would turn around and nip him.

[0:05:00] That happened several times. Finally, my dad retired of it. One time when Jim turned around he grabbed Jim's ear and bit him hard. I'm sure he didn't realize it at the time but that gave him his ultimate toy. He was a great tease because now whenever my dad would come up alongside Jim and go – well Jim would go like this to push him away. If he came up from the front and went – Jim would go like this. So he had his ultimate toy, a talking horse. I'm sure he used it all over the neighborhood because that would be his joy.

[0:06:00] I have a personal experience. My mother had rung the dinner bell to bring them in from the fields and I waited for awhile, came in and slithered in to my seat at the table. She said, "Look at those hands. You know you're supposed to wash your hands and face before you come to the table." So I got up and washed my hands and face and when we had – through eating lunch I said my dad, "Papa, can I ride Jim out to the fields?" He said, "Well we'll ask him." So he went out and he said, "Jim, Francis wants to ride you out to the fields. Would that be all right?" He came up alongside, "No." [Laughs] I said, "Why not?" "Oh he said, 'Remember you forgot to wash your hands and face before you came to the table.'"

[0:07:00] I said, "Oh that wouldn't make any difference." He said, "Jim is it because Francis didn't wash her hands and face when she came to the table? Is that why you don't want her to ride you out to the fields?" He came up in front of him. "Yeah." [Laughter] Of course I squalled. I cried. He – my dad let me have my cry out and he said, "Jim, Francis feels awful bad about this. Do you think if she would promise to always wash her hands and face before she comes to the table do you – I think she could do it. Do you think if she promises to do that you could let her ride you out to the fields?" Got in front of him. "Yeah." So I got to ride Jim out to the field. [Laughter]

[0:08:00] I had two older brothers. They were about 13 and 15 when we moved out there on the farm and they were delighted of the idea of going hunting. So they went out hunting and they brought this rabbit back and my mother began skinning it and she said, "How many times did you shoot this rabbit?" They said, "Well it kept kicking and we just kept shoot" – it was so full of buckshot we couldn't eat it. We had a dog that was part – oh what – what breed are the dogs? Well anyway, they – I'll think of it in a minute. It will float up to the top.

[0:09:00] He would herd rabbits like a shepherd would herd sheep. There was about a 12 inch drain tile along one side of the garden. He would maneuver a rabbit into that drain tile and go end to end barking till we came out with a gunny sack and a long pole and then we would have rabbit for dinner. So it was an exciting time on the farm. Then we moved to the college town and when I was in high school for instance, I would hear conversations and they would say, "Are you going on to college?" Somebody would say, "I don't think so. I don't have any money." Well it was right there in our backyard. I didn't have any money either but not going onto college was not an option in our family.

[0:10:00] We were going. We didn't always know how. But that was just a given. It – so during my college years you name it I did it. I did babysitting. I did filing. I did – I always had a little job on the side. One of the things I remember would be to have our annual housecleaning and we would always – there would always be this box belongs to this brother and this box belongs to another brother. I said, "When I leave this house I am going to take with me or throw away everything I possess," and I did.

[0:11:00] I went from the college graduation to a dietetic internship at Indianapolis City Hospital. It's called something else now but that was long ago. Then when I came to Memphis I said to someone and this probably should be off the record, "If the Southern way of life dies and I'm sure it will it will be because nobody wants to come forward with leadership." I have things back there on my **drywall**. I was **pressuring** this and this and this and this and when I retired and they elected me president of the Retirees' Organization I came home and I said, "Well they elected me president."

[0:12:00] One of my sons said, "Well what else is new?" But it was not that I was overly smart. It wasn't that I was overly popular. It was that I was willing. When they asked me I considered it a compliment and I did my best. That's almost brings us up to date.

Caroline Mulloy: Well going back to your educational experience did integration or segregation affect your educational experiences at all?

Francis Crain: Some people have – got a chuckle out of my first exposure to race prejudice. I was probably about five years old and there was an African American family that owned a farm down across the road.

[0:13:00] **Connie** and **Laudy Pamplyn** were just a part of **things**. They were thrashing crews. They were always a part of it. They had a son named Milton who was about age between me and my next older sister. Well Laudy would come over to visit and she would bring Milton with her and we played and enjoyed the association and my mother's parents were living up in Michigan. Her father was in a terminal illness and it was a family decision that my mother and I should go up there. The older children were all in school. So in typical child fashion I said to my mother, "What's Grandpa's first name?"

[0:14:00] She said, "Milton." I said, "Oh I didn't know Grandpa was a Negro," because the only Milton that I knew was *[laughs]* – she

said, “Why he’s not,” and I knew I had said the wrong thing. So that was my first exposure to racial prejudice *[laughs]*.

Caroline Mulloy: So can you tell me a little bit about your family? Were you married at all?

Francis Crain: I had two brothers and two sisters and after my internship I took – after a few months I took a position on the staff there were I trained.

[0:15:00] I began dating this medical student. I graduated from college in 1935 and Jim Crain and I got married in 1937. He finished medical school and had an appointment for an internship at Kansas City General and I got a job in Kansas City. Let’s see. Is there anything relevant about my brothers and sisters?

[0:16:00] It might be of interest that I have talked so much about the farm and the farm was eventually taken in as part of a state park. A couple of my friends are going to drive me up there. I probably won’t recognize a single thing *[laughter]* but anyway, they’re going up so I can see this farm where I lived.

Holly McGlown: So do you have any children?

Francis Crain: I have two sons.

Holly McGlown: What are their names?

Francis Crain: One lives in Knoxville. He went to law school at UT in Knoxville and he always says that those that graduated from UT law school that didn’t have money to get out of town went into practice in Knoxville *[laughs]*. My other son went to school here in Memphis when it was still Memphis State and he went into marketing.

[0:17:00] He got his masters in marketing and was hired by IBM while he was still a student and he’s a good salesman. I one time said that there were two things that I had no aptitude for; I had no desire to do. One was teaching. The other was sales. Now that I’m older and I hope a little wiser I know there are two things you do every day of your life. Whether you want to or not doesn’t matter, whether you have an aptitude just determines how good a job you do but you teach and you sell *[laughs]*.

Caroline Mulloy: So are there any experiences from your life growing up on the farm or in college or with your children that have influenced you later in life?

[0:18:00]

Francis Crain:

Well when I came to Memphis I figured that my job was half nutrition education because that's what the Dairy Council Program is. The other half was public relations. So I wanted to be careful not to be tagged as a **reformer** Yankee that came down to tell people how to do their business. So I couldn't be an activist in the normal sense of the word. I had to function in other ways.

[0:19:00]

I didn't make the suggestion because of that feeling that I didn't want to be tagged as a reformer Yankee but **Raymond Skinner** who was half owner of the old **Forest Hill** Dairy in the early '50s said – we did a lot of work with schools and he said he thought it would be appropriate for us to hire a professional African American nutritionist. Well that was a great idea. So I picked up on it immediately and hired right there. Three annual reports there so you can see the day at which we did that and it was quite early. There weren't very many places that were making a point of that.

[0:20:00]

We would have an annual meeting and we would arrange to have it someplace and one – a member of our executive committee was the member of the University Club and he said, "Well I can make arrangements for us to have our annual meeting at the University Club." So we all approved of that and I don't remember whether it was at that meeting or a subsequent meeting that I said, "Do you think it would be appropriate and acceptable for us to invite one table of their leaders **to grace forthwith**," and they all that – and the member that made it said, "Well I'll check with the University Club."

[0:21:00]

He did. Everything was approved. The night came for the annual meeting and there was this cocky, little **manny** rooster type man who was a member of the University Club and when he saw the black people coming into the University Club he pitched a fit and went to the club manager with whom it had all been cleared and said that the member who made those arrangement should be booted out of the club and that I personally should never be allowed to set foot in the University Club. I think that is – there was an exhibit of **Ernest Withers'** photography over at **Brooks** and my neighbors down the street went in – they said they were going along and all of a sudden there was a picture and there I was.

[0:22:00]

So it apparently is – it was identified as a Dairy Council function. That is the only connection that I can see.

Caroline Mulloy: Can you tell us a little bit about the breakfasts that you used to have?

Francis Crain: Oh yes. I was a member of the First Congregation Church and there was a member who left a sizable bequest to his church.

[0:23:00] There was a group in the congregation that any progressive idea that was brought up would say, "Well let's have it read into the minutes that this was passed by a two-thirds majority," because they knew they had the third and we knew they didn't have half. At one of the annual meetings the question was raised as to how the person who was handling the bequest was a **campaign** to the congregation. Well he took it very personally and there was this huge display of hurt feelings. In my opinion when you're handling somebody else's money if you're not doing it to their satisfaction you get busy and do so. So that was sort of a last straw and I wrote a letter and said, "**Please rue** my name and membership list."

[0:24:00] That was about the time I retired. I was working for the county at the time. I looked around and I thought, "I've lived in this neighborhood more than 25 years. I know the people on either side of me." So I decided I would serve breakfast/brunch on Sunday morning. I went around and told them what I planned to do and we designed a flag that at first I tied out there on the street light that's right in front of the house. Many years later one of the neighbors put the flagpole there and had somebody design a flag that I can show you and it – for probably 25 years that I did these breakfasts.

[0:25:00] There was – the neighborhood actually included on Angelus and this part of Avalon and there was somebody over there who rubbed the feathers of some people the wrong way and they were saying, "Well can't we limit it to the people on Avalon," or, "Can't we do this? Can't we do that?" It had always been everybody's welcome. This neighborhood here on Avalon is marginally integrated. I thought it over and my 90th birthday was coming up. When you start something like that there's no place in stopping it.

[0:26:00] "So and so shouldn't be included because they're Jewish. So and so shouldn't be included because they're African American. So and so shouldn't be included because" – there's no place in stopping. So I just decided that that was the time to quit. So I – after my 90th birthday I did this beautiful last breakfast and some of them said, "Well we'll miss this," and I said, "Well probably no one will miss it more than I will." **My room** would say, "Well my kitchen isn't big enough," and somebody else would say, "Well I

don't have enough plates." So I said, "Well if you want to use my house you may. It's all set up for it. I can provide oatmeal" – my oatmeal has a reputation *[laughs]* – and coffee and the person who's doing the breakfast will have to do everything else including putting out the flag and cleaning up the kitchen *[laughter]*.

[0:27:00] Every once in awhile they do. We've had two this year.

Holly McGlown: Well now –

Francis Crain: I did get to know my neighbors.

Holly McGlown: Now we're going to talk a little bit more about the 1950s through the 1970s. Are there anymore special memories or special stories that you can share with us?

Francis Crain: Well one of the members of the Retirees' Organization who's African American said, "You have always made us feel so welcome in your home," that it's outstanding.

Holly McGlown: How do you think other people view you, viewed you during this time period since you were helping African American people and you were really trying to share your love with them?

[0:28:00] How do you think that went over with other people?

Francis Crain: I'm sorry but my hearing aid wouldn't – go through that again.

Holly McGlown: How do you think other people viewed you during this time period since you were helping African Americans, since you were so open to them?

Francis Crain: Well I think **Marie's** reaction is probably the **classic**. There's another thing. I had a friend who was in a play when Circuit Playhouse was over here on Poplar. It didn't get particularly good reviews but some of us went as part of **Julie's** fan club.

[0:29:00] In this play she's quoting and she says, "Harold says everybody needs hugs. You need three a day for maintenance, five for health and nine for growth." So we gave maintenance hugs. That has endured and it applies to everybody. I think they would ask – I rent out my two upstairs rooms and one of them is a young man who's been here about 12 years now but he is from Vermont and his – he calls it a ministry.

- [0:30:00] His ministry is Cooperative Computer Ministry. He has easily as many if not more African Americans involved in his ministry than whites.
- Holly McGlown: Well I want to ask you now about a very prominent incident in Memphis history and that was the assassination of Martin Luther King. Can you tell me where you were and how you felt when you heard the news that he was assassinated?
- Francis Crain: Well I came here as Executive Director of the Dairy Council Program.
- [0:31:00] I did that for 14 years. I learned early after coming that you had better be sure you kept people who provided the money for your program informed as to what you were doing. So this was way back before Xerox and we were using a mimeograph machine and I had somebody whose writing you can read as sometimes I can't read my own writing write at the top of the stencil **Dear Foss**. Then I would tell in a chatty fashion the things that we were doing in the schools and with the professional groups and so forth. National Dairy Council wasn't sure it was professional enough but the dairymen liked it.
- [0:32:00] One of them said, "Why don't we have Mrs. Crain write a page-based column **where** the food section of the *Commercial Appeal*?" So I did that for a couple of years. At that time the person at Commercial Appeal who was doing their food feature column was a woman who really and truly hated _____. She got sick and they promised her that when she came back she wouldn't have to do that. They had seen my column and they called me and asked if I would be interested in doing it. Well I had to bring that before our executive committee and get approval because it would be sort of moonlighting and I had to use a pen name because the paper could be criticized for having someone who was employed fulltime by a food industry, the dairy industry, writing a food column.
- [0:33:00] In fact I had tried to – I had taken a gander at selling a food column and got a nibble from somebody up in Indiana and they came down and at that time we had two papers, the *Commercial Appeal* and the *Press Scimitar* and he went over to see **Ed Neeman** who was editor of the *Press Scimitar* and Neeman said, "Well" – I guess he was asking if he would be interested. Said, "Well of course I couldn't use it. She would fill it with dairy products." So I did it under the pen name of **Sarah Kay** and I did that for nine years.

[0:34:00] By that time National Dairy Council had decided it was professional enough. So I took a job with the National Dairy Council. Actually, I was working in Chicago at the time Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. I was in the loop and there was one of these billboards that kept a running story of the news and I saw in there that he had been assassinated in Memphis and I was struck dumb. I could not imagine that happening here.

Holly McGlown: So you were in Chicago when you heard about the assassination of Martin Luther King. Being in the North how do you think people in the North reacted to it?

Francis Crain: How do I think what?

Holly McGlown: The people in the North reacted to his assassination?

Francis Crain: Oh. Well it didn't have the impact on them that it had on me certainly because this was my home.

[0:35:00]

Holly McGlown: Do you think that tensions rose in Memphis after his assassination between blacks and whites?

Francis Crain: Do I think what?

Holly McGlown: Tensions rose in Memphis between blacks and whites after his assassination?

Francis Crain: Well there have been many good and sincere attempts to improve race relations but I – it is my personal opinion that **Willy Harrington** did more to divide than to unite the blacks and the whites.

[0:36:00] But there have been as I say many good and sincere attempts.

Holly McGlown: Did you hear about any marches or participate in any marches during the Civil Rights Movement?

Francis Crain: No. As I said to begin with when I first came here my job was 50 percent public relations and I had to be careful not to be a **bread leaning** activist because the program was supported by a group of people.

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

Francis Crain: Well let's think a minute.

[0:37:00] I think this street has been a model of good intentions. As I say it is marginally integrated and there's never been any incidents that have been a blemish. It has all been – when we have the neighborhood night out everyone is included.

Holly McGlown: Well we want to thank you for interviewing with us. When this is going to conclude our interview it's going to be on our Website, CrossroadsToFreedom.org and you'll be able to pull it up and view it.

Francis Crain: Some of my friends have been asking, "Is it going to be on television? How can we see it?"

[0:38:00] The letter I believe said it would be on the Webpage?

Caroline Mulloy: Yes, ma'am.

Francis Crain: Yeah, so that you can see it on the Webpage?

Caroline Mulloy: Yes, ma'am.

Holly McGlown: Yes, ma'am.

Caroline Mulloy: Do you have the address for that Webpage?

[End of Audio]