



Patricia Lacy, 2014

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Damesha Boone: On behalf of Crossroads to Freedom, Rhodes College, and Knowledge Quest; I want to thank you for taking the time to share your story with us today. I'm Damesha Boone.

Rodtavis Miller: And I'm Rodtavis Miller.

Damesha Boone: And I'm honored to meet you and learn from your inspirational story. Today's interview will be archived online at Crossroads to Freedom website. Today's date is July 9, 2014. Can you state some basic biographical information for the record? What is your name?

Patricia Lacey: My name is Patricia B. Lacey, L-A-C-E-Y.

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

Patricia Lacey: I was born in May 13, 1937.

Damesha Boone: Were you born and raised in Memphis?

Patricia Lacey: No, I was not born –

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and raised in Memphis. Well, there is a long story. I came to Memphis in 1960. The reason I came to Memphis is that was my husband's home. And I met my husband years earlier when we were in school. We met in North Carolina, which is my home state. And he and another young man left Memphis to attend college in Raleigh, North Carolina. And we met and then we became friends and became married, and he brought me to Memphis.

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Damesha Boone: Did you enjoy staying in North Carolina or do you like it in Memphis better?

Patricia Lacey: Well, I enjoyed being raised in North Carolina, and the location where I was born was in the southeastern part of North Carolina. And I enjoyed the area which I was raised in. It was a rural area. And the people were very close knit, so that had, I think, a great positive effect on me and others as we were beginning our life in that kind of surrounding. So I enjoyed it –

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but coming in to Memphis, I found that – well, I had the experience of living in a small town and then I lived in a larger town. I lived in New York, and so by coming to Memphis, I found that that was a happy medium between the two kinds of experiences.

Damesha Boone: So you just stated that you stayed in New York. Did you like it in New York? How long did you stay?

Patricia Lacey: All right. I stayed in New York – see, New York, for me in the area in which I lived, it was about 450 miles from my home area. And I lived in New York. I went to school in New York in the early days. So I lived there for about two years when I was little –

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and we moved back south. And then I kept going back and forth to New York because my grandmother lived in New York, and I would visit there often. So I had a lot of experience in New York.

Damesha Boone: What was your occupation?

Patricia Lacey: By occupation, having come to Memphis after graduating from college, I was a classroom teacher. And so I came to Memphis, my husband and I, and I was hired by the Memphis City School System as an elementary teacher. And I enjoyed that experience, and I gave the Memphis City School System 33 of my years working in that kind of occupation.

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Damesha Boone: So if you worked in Memphis City Schools for 33 years, would you say you enjoyed the job or you really liked it?

Patricia Lacey: Oh, I enjoyed the job. I enjoyed working with the students and, as I said, I was an elementary teacher, so I worked with grades from second through sixth grade. At that time, many times many of the schools didn't have kindergarten. Kindergarten hadn't been introduced the bulk of my experience in working in the Memphis City School System. So I never taught first grade, but I worked in those other grades. And I enjoyed it.

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Damesha Boone: What is your spouse's name and occupation?

Patricia Lacey: All right. And thanks for asking. My husband's name was **Richard E. Lacey**. And he too worked in the Memphis City School System. And upon our coming back – well, his coming back to Memphis and my making my intro in to Memphis, which was in 1960, he decided that he would enroll in to one of the colleges here in Memphis. And so he enrolled in what is called today is University of Memphis, but he enrolled –

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At that time it was known as Memphis State College. So he had already – as I said, he had already graduated from undergrad school, and he decided that he would enroll in to Memphis State to work in the graduate program. And so he did. But however, at that time, prior to the '60s – and I'm sure perhaps you are familiar with the term segregation – many facilities and colleges were segregated. And so, naturally, Memphis State was segregated as well. But however, in the late '50s, Memphis State had begun to permit –

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other races to attend the school, preferably African Americans. But I think it was in '59 when – and I have something here that states, and you may want to read this a little bit later. But it tells that in 1959, some 4,500 students enrolled in Memphis State, but no one had graduated from Memphis State. And my husband decided to enroll in the graduate program, and so in '62 –

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he was the first African American to receive a degree from Memphis State. And luckily, that was a lot of highlight news, and so in the newspaper – and I have – this is some information in regards to a print up about him. As you can see, it says, "Lacey's degree was Memphis State's first African American to receive a degree." Even though other African Americans had enrolled, but naturally they were in – the level would be like freshman or if there were transfers –

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they would be at a higher level. But he went through the process

of going through in the graduate program, and he received his degree. And it was in the newspaper a whole lot. I have other items here from the newspaper. This is an article that was written in the newspaper. And that is the same picture that I just showed you a second ago –

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but just showing you the newspaper here. So that was history because for Memphis it was the first time to have this kind of experience to happen dealing with my husband. And so he made an interesting contribution to the educational arena.

Damesha Boone: Can you elaborate on the attention that was shown through your husband's success? Like how did it affect you and your husband, and what type of attention, like media came to you?

Patricia Lacey: Okay. The whole time when he was attending Memphis State in the graduate program, I have said that many times I was nervous –

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afraid because I didn't know what he would encounter on a daily base. And sometimes he would come home and share with me what his day had been like in just one on ones with different people. In dealing with the race, it was somewhat of a problem. And even I can remember on the day that he was – it was the day for his graduation, and most times when you're getting ready to go to a graduation, you are happy, right? I got up that morning and I got dressed, but I was not happy. I was more nervous. I was scared. So you don't think of being scared to go to a graduation, but I didn't –

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I had the feeling – I didn't know what might happen. Because in graduations, we are accustomed to hearing one's name called and that person will walk out and everybody's happy. And I was wondering when they called my husband's name, would somebody do something that was negative in a way. And so I have always said that I was scared when I got ready to go to the graduation. But then on the – that was on a Saturday, and I have calendars here. It was on January 27th of 1962. Now, these are calendars that have been made since then and, naturally, this was 1998.

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Okay. But the idea of him doing something good affected others of us in a negative way. And then on – the graduation was on Saturday, and on – the next day, perhaps, in the newspaper they had the big write up and everything. At that time we had two newspapers. We had the *Commercial Appeal*, and we had another newspaper which was called the *Press Scimitar*. And both newspapers had the write up because this was – and then at that time, we were known as Negroes. Okay? So one of the papers stated that, "Memphis State has its –

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first Negro to receive a degree." And then when I went to work on that Monday – I don't know if some of you are familiar with the radio station WDIA? Okay. WDIA played it all that Saturday, and many of my co-workers, when I went to work on that Monday, they were saying, "Pat," or, "Miss Lacey," or whatever they called me, they were saying that they had heard it on the radio station about the success that had occurred over at Memphis State about my husband graduating. 'Cause I don't even think I had even mentioned to them about him even attending the school or whatever. So it affected people in negative and positive ways –

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and that type thing.

Damesha Boone: To keep the flow, did you have children? What were their names, if so?

Patricia Lacey: All right. Well, we had two children, and I jokingly say we are in twos, the number of twos works in my family. We had two children: a daughter and a son. And my daughter lives in Atlanta, and her name – her birth name was **Rosaline Earlene** Lacey. And I chose that name so that she would have the same initials as her dad. His name was Richard **Earl** Lacey. And I put the E-N-E onto Earl so that she has Rosaline Earlene Lacey.

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And, of course, she's married and now her last name is **Faison**. Rosaline Earlene Faison. And my son, his name – and my husband copied after me, and so he named our son **Patrick Barane** Lacey so

that he would have the same initials as I have, and Patrick is **Aneesa's** father.

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

Patricia Lacey: Yes. I will always remember it because, as I stated earlier, it was more like a hamlet, I guess small. My husband –

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used to tease after he started visiting my home area, he told someone that it was a like a sign – you know how you have the name of a town, a big sign, and as soon as you pass the sign, you were in and out of the town, meaning it was so small. But it was rural, and people were concerned about each other. And so you felt that you were loved and respected, and you were taught to be respectful. So I am happy to have had that experience growing up.

Damesha Boone: What was your home life like?

Patricia Lacey: My home life, I am going to say was terrific. On a scale of 0 to 10, 10 plus. My mom –

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and dad were rural people. My daddy owned a farm, and my mother was a busy person doing everything. And I was an only child for 12 years, and then they had a baby. So at that point, I was having to get adjusted to not being the only child, but then I began to learn how to care for a little brother. But my dad was a fun like person, and many people liked him. And he was an independent kind of person, so I had a good life.

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Damesha Boone: Who are your parents?

Patricia Lacey: My parents' name, is that what you – my father's name was **Thurmond** and **Harper** Briscoe. Briscoe was my last name, B-R-I-S-C-O-E. And my mother's name was Allean, and it was spelled A-L-L-E-A-N. And her maiden name was Gwaltney, G-W-A-L-T-N-E-Y. And her middle name was **Leslie**. So she was Allean Leslie Gwaltney until she married my dad. And then, as I say, 12 years later they had my brother, and his name – and I named him.

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And I named him **Tyrone Scott** because there was a movie star whose name was Tyrone Scott, and I copied after that name.

Damesha Boone: What school did you attend?

Patricia Lacey: Okay. Now, I attended school in North Carolina starting in the first grade. The name of that school was Roduco, R-O-D-U-C-O. And it was in the – and I'm sure you have no idea of what the rural life is like, but the schools were built on a small scale. You probably, seeing it today, would say, "Oh, that's just a house." It was small. You may have one room and –

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several classes would be in one room. So that's when I started first grade, but then my parents moved up to New York and lived in an area called Harlem. Have you ever heard of Harlem, H-A-R-L-E-M? Okay. We lived 39 West 135th Street, Apartment 15. And so I had started going in the first grade in the Roduco Elementary School, but the interruption was that we went to New York. And I could remember hearing my parents – I mean my grandmother who lived in New York and my aunt and all saying, "Oh, if she's going to go to school here in New York –

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they are probably going to put her back in the," – in New York, perhaps, they had a kindergarten because I was in the first grade. So anyway, they took me to school, and my mother carried me and we were sitting in the office. And the particular information about me was told to the secretary, and so I guess they made a decision and what they did was to have me to go and read for the principal. And I'm in the first grade. Okay. And so the secretary or somebody came and got me and took me into a room where the principal was, and they gave me a book, and I had to read. And the principal's –

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name, I will always remember, was Miss **Hunt**. And so I had never seen her before, but they gave me a book and I read. And evidently Miss Hunt approved my reading or something, and so they took me and put me in the first grade with the other children as opposed to putting me back in kindergarten because I'm now

trying to get in to this school. And also I want to say this about the schools in New York. They are known by numbers as opposed to names. Here in many areas you have the name of the school has a particular proper noun or name. And in New York, they use the symbol PS, public school, 89. And that's where –

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I went, to public school 89. Okay.

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

Patricia Lacey: Oh right. What churches did I attend when I was young in North Carolina or here in Memphis?

Damesha Boone: Both.

Patricia Lacey: Okay. In North Carolina I attended a church which was named New Hope Baptist Church, and I did that all the way until I left to go away to college. And then coming to Memphis after marrying my husband, who was an Episcopalian, so when I came to Memphis I started attending his church, the church he grew up in here in Memphis. And it's known as Emmanuel Episcopal –

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Church, and so I started attending that church. And then I had a little bit of reflection on the Baptist church, and there was a church close by where I live right now, and I started attending that church. And then my daughter whom I spoke of earlier, Rosaline, after she attended college and what have you, she met a young man and they married. And he is of the Catholic faith, so that sort of got my attention. Prior to their marrying, they had to have counseling and that type thing. And I found that that got my attention, and so –

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after they married, then I made – my interest got to dealing with the Catholic faith, and so I joined a Catholic church. And currently I'm attending the St. Augustine's Catholic Church, which is at 1169 Kerr Avenue, and I would love to have you attend my church sometime.

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

Patricia Lacey: Well, I think one of the things that perhaps helped me would be going back when I was in school at an early age. I remember –

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and perhaps I was in the second grade. There was a particular program that the teachers were having, and they had some students participating. And I was on stage telling a story, and the story was about the three little pigs. And while standing on stage, evidently I got the pigs all mixed up. And so I'm standing there trying to get the pigs. I was getting it all messed up. And my teacher was over – you know how a stage has and it will have an offset room where you enter the stage from?

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And the teacher, whose name was Mrs. Smith, she was standing there and she could see me and I could sort of see her. But she didn't tell me to come off the stage. She let me stay on the stage until I got those pigs puffing and huffing in the right order that they needed to. And I have always said from that point till this very moment that that was a good thing that she didn't beckon for me to come off the stage, but she let me deal with that. And finally when I got it straightened out, I went on and told the story. It seems like that gave me confidence, and that was very special to me. And then I remember –

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in fourth grade I was given the "Gettysburg Address" to say. And teachers started using me to participate in different kinds of programs. And even so I remember when I was in high school there was a poem called "Let America Be America Again." And I would say that and be in competition with other students and go to colleges and what have you, and I would win in oratorical contests and that type thing.

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So it sorta got my attention. I would be in plays and what have you. And so I have enjoyed all of that. So those were some of the things that might have happened that had an effect on me later in life.

Rodtavis Miller: Okay. Let's talk about your life in South Memphis. Okay. This first question will be exactly what does South Memphis mean to you?

Patricia Lacey: South Memphis has a strong meaning to me because upon knowing that – when I came to Memphis, South Memphis was where my husband –

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brought me because he had lived in South Memphis. And that's all I know. In 1960 when I came here – it has a strong meaning. I've met people. People were within the community. I lived at his home address one year, and I was able to connect with the physical and the emotional aspects of that community. There were businesses that were operated by the community people. Basically the Negroes in the community had a barbershop –

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a grocery store, and there was a school right across the street from where my husband had been raised. Memphis had, at the time when I came, a strong presentation to me that it was real good.

Rodtavis Miller: Since you mentioned that you moved down here in, basically, the '60s, exactly what was going on around that time? How was South Memphis during that time?

Patricia Lacey: As I said, within your own little area, you had enough to –

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make you believe that you were happily satisfied. Of course, as I alluded to earlier, we had – segregation was in full existence, so you had little – and I have come up with a quote that I call it you had little, but you had more. Because within that little area, there was strong possibilities and those kinds of things. So your question, again, is – what is your question?

Rodtavis Miller: Like what was going on? Exactly how was life like during that time? How did it make you feel growing up during segregation? Did you feel limited to resources during that time?

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Patricia Lacey: I guess you felt limited in one sense but then you had not been exposed to anything else, but I believe it was beginning to happen with different generations dealing with segregation. Our foreparents dealt with segregation in one way, and then the next generation began to pay a little more attention, and it became a bigger challenge to each generation. And so I can remember –

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when I was in high school, the idea of segregation – your being able to not go over here, you have to stay over here – we began to question that. And then generations after my generation from high school began to challenge it more, and that is why in today's world, in your world, you are able to say, "I want to go into the," blah, blah, and you just get up and go. And then it wasn't like that for me to want to go in. There were signs that were up to remind you that you can't – if you have a certain color, you can't go into this area.

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So those kinds of things have – they were affecting us in our generation, and we chose to challenge – it was a challenge for us, and we chose to try to make a difference. Okay.

Rodtavis Miller: Does that make you feel proud that you – oh okay. Does the change from then to now, does that make you feel proud?

Patricia Lacey: Yes and no. Yes, it makes me feel – because I guess as a race of people, we were wanting to be equal –

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have equality there for everybody, and so that was what we were fighting for. And you asked me does it make me feel proud or sad maybe.

Rodtavis Miller: Like how that change, how does that make you feel? Are you happy about it? Afraid of it? How does it make you feel?

Patricia Lacey: Yeah. I'm happy. I'm happy about it, but I feel that a lot has been lost in the way of respect and that kind of thing. And I think if you don't have a caring for people, a respect that you show to other people –

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then a lot is lost. A lot of good can continue to go on. You need to have patience and show some – everybody needs a little bit of dignity, and you need to show dignity towards people.

Rodtavis Miller: This next question is from your perspective, exactly what is the reputation of South Memphis?

Patricia Lacey: Oh. Well, I would think the reputation for South Memphis would be that you have hard-working people. Mainly blue collar workers wanting to –

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focus as much as they can on education. And I think the reputation in South Memphis has been, on a scale of 0 to 10, a good 8. Okay.

Rodtavis Miller: So you're saying even though this is a good city, it's still – I'm sorry. So you're saying even though this is like a really good city, there's still a few setbacks?

Patricia Lacey: Do I feel like it's a good city?

Rodtavis Miller: But like still have a few setbacks?

Patricia Lacey: Yes, I think it's a good city, and it –

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Yeah. It's a good city. It may have some setbacks, and you want to know what those setbacks are?

Rodtavis Miller: Yes, ma'am.

Patricia Lacey: Okay. Perhaps dealing with our education, we may be letting – in our preparation for our young people, we may be getting out of – may not be focusing as much attention on preparing our youth so that they can easily be able to –

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maneuver in a positive way. I would think, educationally, many times the preparation within our schools, the skills that were existing years ago may not be existing in the curriculum at a school today. And so you have students who may attend 12 years and go

through that process of marching and are not prepared to do anything because you may have some who don't choose to go to college, but in yesteryear –

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they were able to learn varied kinds of skills in their school such as barbering, males learning how to cut hair, females learning how to sew and home ec and those kinds of things. So I would think that that could be a setback, in not working in our educational program could help to make us low on the totem pole.

Rodtavis Miller: And so do you think the educational system has gone soft a little bit? 'Cause I know from when you were growing up, education had to be a top priority

Patricia Lacey: Yes.

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Rodtavis Miller: So do you think the educational system has gone a little soft?

Patricia Lacey: Going a little soft, is that what you're saying?

Rodtavis Miller: Yes, ma'am.

Patricia Lacey: Okay. Well, it has changed, and it has definitely changed. Home has changed.

Rodtavis Miller: Could you elaborate on that? Could you tell me exactly how has it changed?

Patricia Lacey: How has home?

Rodtavis Miller: And the educational system, how has it changed in your eyes?

Patricia Lacey: Well, having had the experience of working with the lower –

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I mean the younger children, the home – my experience had been where you were working with the student and the home was there to support you. It seems in today's world, you may not get that total support from home, which makes it somewhat of a problem or a big challenge for the school to be able to do its part. And so I think that affects the education.

Rodtavis Miller: Well, to get back on about living here in Memphis.

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Exactly what are some places in South Memphis that makes this a great place to be?

Patricia Lacey: All right. Now, we have – in South Memphis there is the Stax Museum. And before we get to the Stax, of course, going back to the schools. There is the college, LeMoyne-Owen College. And when I first came to Memphis in '60, there was a junior college which was named Owen College. And you may get the connection by hearing in your lifetime of LeMoyne-Owen. So what they did, they took and joined the two together, the junior college –

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and the already four-year college, and they renamed it LeMoyne-Owen College. And so that was here for the students who chose and wanted to go to college, but maybe for varied reasons, they didn't leave Memphis, so they had a college right here within their environment to attend. Whereby, if I may go back to when I was raised in North Carolina, the closest college to me, black college, was in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, which was about 35 miles from me. But here in Memphis, they didn't have to go 35 miles. The people being born and raised in Memphis could –

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attend LeMoyne College at that time. So we have Stax Museum, LeMoyne College, and then recently we have what is known as a farmer's market in Memphis. And the farmer's market was developed because of a need that was studied. And a study was done in an area, and it was decided that they needed to have a market. Because in a particular area, I think the zip code is 38106, and it was found that they didn't have access to grocery stores.

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And so a farmer's market was developed about four years ago. And so that is a plus for South Memphis. And prior to getting the market, it was – and I don't know if you are familiar with the term a food desert? All right. A food desert. And that's what has been given to an area that doesn't have grocery stores. And that is developing not only in Memphis, but throughout these United

States, where varied areas don't have grocery stores. And so that affects our health when we are not able to buy the proper –

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foods that we need to eat, and our health gets bad. Okay.

Rodtavis Miller: That's okay. Do you have anything else?

Patricia Lacey: No.

Rodtavis Miller: Well, okay. Since you stated a few assets to the community, here comes a hard question. Exactly what is the best thing about South Memphis?

Patricia Lacey: Okay. The best – you want to know the best thing?

Rodtavis Miller: Yes, ma'am.

Patricia Lacey: Okay. The best thing – okay. There are – we have churches, and they are instrumental in a spiritual way for all of us.

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And we are able to enjoy that atmosphere of attending church. We have, for the sports area, in South Memphis there is a park which is known as Bellevue Park. And I think in recent years it was given in tribute and honor to Jesse Turner, so he made a great contribution to Memphis. But Bellevue Park is something that I feel good about –

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because it allows varied kinds of little athletic programs to go there and play baseball and what have you. And Aneesa Lacey's father umpires some of the games there at Bellevue Park.

Rodtavis Miller: Well, okay. Due to a few setbacks in South Memphis, South Memphis isn't exactly the perfect place to be. But what do you think would make South Memphis a better place?

Patricia Lacey: Something that would make South Memphis a better place would be – I guess this would be unique to all of us in –

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the world. If we could begin to have more respect and have motives planned and try to have a purpose of improving whatever you have. If we could work together better, I think that would help all of us. But if we stay divided – you got a little group over here trying to promote something and a little group over here trying to promote something, then a lot of energy is going into it, but it's going in different ways. And I think that we –

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need to work closer together and have more respect for each other and for the ideas that we might have.

Rodtavis Miller: Well, okay. And you mentioned improvements, and thankfully we do have a few improvements in South Memphis. Some of those being such as college, park. But due to those improvements, are you hopeful about the future of South Memphis?

Patricia Lacey: Yes. Yes, I am. I am, and I'm thinking now about something that – and maybe I should have shared it earlier but didn't. But it's dealing with the communities and trying to find out what is the stronghold in a community. And just last year –

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I was on a – was participating in a study dealing with our schools, and there are many schools that they are trying to close. And when you have a community that doesn't have a school, then a closed school is a closed community. You know? So there again, it says to me that we need to find out what's important and then work together to make or keep that important. You know? And so I kept going to these meetings, and a particular school that I was concerned about, it had been on the list to close, but because many of us met and we were there –

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We went to the board of education. We met and met and met. They did keep that school open. So it's important for each of us, and you, as young people, please take the torch and do whatever you can in a good way to help your community so that you can pass it on to your family and friends. So it's just gonna take working together.

Rodtavis Miller: Well, I know it's a little off subject, but I couldn't help but notice the trophy, and I wanted to ask about it.

Patricia Lacey: Well, I didn't get it for running. *[Laughs]* Okay. This trophy was presented to –

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not just me, but I received it on behalf of – I received this on behalf of my church and the community. This was presented to us in April of this year, April 17th. One of our leaders in Memphis whose name is Robert Lipscomb, and he was the head and the planner dealing with neighborhood improvement, redevelopment of neighborhoods. And they had a conference for three days. The second day there were 23 exhibits –

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at Tiger Lane. Are you familiar with Tiger Lane? Okay. And so I was asked and learned about this two weeks before the presentation and was asked would I like to represent. Because at my church I am a garden coordinator, which deals with my church and the immediate community. And so I chose and told them that I would participate. And so I gathered up information, as much detailed information as I could, and this was the end result. They had three trophies: first, second, and third. And we were presented the third place trophy.

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And the name of our garden is St. Augustine's Parkway Community Garden. And so that is what that is about. Okay. Any questions?

Rodtavis Miller: No, ma'am. No ma'am.

Patricia Lacey: Okay.

Rodtavis Miller: It's nice though.

Patricia Lacey: Well –

Rodtavis Miller: You're all right. You can bring it out 'cause I'm pretty sure it's a few fond memories that you would like to share.

Patricia Lacey: Please. Maybe I should have said it earlier, but okay. She's smiling. Okay. I'm a clown. **Kenny** is nodding his head.

[Laughs] Remind me to tell you something about that. Okay.
And this, one of my friends took.

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I went over to her house and these are pictures, so you can look.
But I started clowning, I think, after I retired from work, I believe,
or maybe a year or two before I – yeah, a year or two before I
actually retired because I know my co-workers helped me to come
up with my stage name.

Rodtavis Miller: What was that?

Patricia Lacey: My stage name?

Rodtavis Miller: Yes, ma'am.

Patricia Lacey: Okay. You know a part of what my name is, Pat, well, Patricia.
Okay. My stage name was Chatty Patty. Chatty Patty because I'm
running my mouth. And I wanted Pat in there some kind of way,
so my co-workers and all –

[1:01:00]

came up. They said, "Chatty Patty," and that type thing. You can.
But that was some – and I think I came about with that because of
little people wanting to – little children sometimes didn't have a
chance to enjoy the little parties and whatever. And I wanted to
make it – and I think Chatty Patty the ABC Clown, and that was
what I was doing. That's why I brought this to tell. And also, I do
volunteer work too. I try to keep that – I even did volunteer work
when I was working, so different agencies and what have you.

Rodtavis Miller: Could you tell me some of the places –

[1:02:00]

that you volunteered at?

Patricia Lacey: Okay. Okay. Currently I volunteer at the library, the Benjamin
Hooks Library. And I've been there – I'm into my tenth year there
at the Benjamin Hooks Library. As a matter of fact, they will be
having the volunteer recognition this coming Sunday, July 13th.
But I have volunteered at hotline, which is – I think I did that when
I was working because I would go maybe like four times a month

in the evening and so. Say people may call in and have a problem. Okay?

[1:03:00]

And sometimes when you have a problem, it's good to share that problem with someone. And what would happen is that you may call in and I would answer the phone, "Hotline. May I help you?" And then you start talking, talking, talking. And then we were trained to know how to respond to you, and then sometimes I even found that person who called in to me would say, "Oh, you have helped me so much." And to myself, I'm thinking, "What have I done?" But what I did do was I had been trained to listen as opposed to saying, "Girl," or, "Boy, you ought to do so and so."

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So that was an interesting kind of experience at volunteering with the hotline. Then I have worked with the American Cancer Society, and I was trained there to become a smoke cessation facilitator. So that was something that I did whereby I would help you if you smoked to try to stop smoking. Okay? And sometimes I would have as many as 15 to 20 people in a class. These are grownups. Okay? And probably – this was time before –

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any of you were born. It used to be where you worked and you – if you smoked, you could smoke at your workplace. Okay? But then society, the Health Department all began to realize that it was not good for you to be able to smoke. So the employers began to realize that, "Oh, I've got a problem. I've got all these people who can't be smoking anymore at the workplace." And so now they are going to need to know how to sorta calm the employees, and then those of us who volunteered with the American Cancer Society, we were sent –

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out to speak and teach these people how to stop smoking and that type thing. So that was what I did with the American Cancer Society. And I've done other stuff. I think my first volunteering was dealing with a hospital that they don't have anymore. It was called John Gaston Hospital. And I went in there because I wanted to not deal with medical stuff. From a little girl, I never had the desire to want to be a nurse. Most time you think of little girls,

they want to be a nurse. I don't think I ever wanted to be a nurse. But what I wanted to do was, I guess, relate –

[1:07:00]

to people, and so sometimes I would push the cart around to the rooms where the patient could choose to get a drink or a magazine or something off of this little cart that I was pushing. And then the other thing that I enjoyed was that sometimes in a hospital, you have a relative who's there, and that relative has to be there several days. You know? Then the family becomes so involved until they have a room where they are stationed in. And then I wanted to be in that room to intermingle with them to see if it was something they needed from wherever in the hospital, then I would go and get it for them and that type thing. So I enjoyed that.

[1:08:00]

And it's some other kind of volunteering I've done. I enjoy doing that.

Rodtavis Miller:

Well, okay. We're almost done. A few more questions. Okay. You said you're from North Carolina, correct? Well, how would you compare living there to South Memphis? You can keep going.

Patricia Lacey:

Okay. How would I compare living in North Carolina compared to Memphis? The comparisons are so different, and I have respect for North Carolina and I have a respect for Memphis. But, as I say, they are different, different. And I'm glad to have had some North Carolina in me every day.

[1:09:00]

I am so proud. And so much so that even I hear my two children, who are grown people now and have their own families, but they will often mention about – because I would take them when they were little when school would close for us in the summer, I would go and take them there, and we would stay there a month. And then my husband would be here working, and then he would come a little bit later. Because I wanted them to have the experience of visiting my parents, and they got to know what it was like. And even her dad, my granddaughter's dad, will sometimes in just conversation, he'll mention, "My hometown," or, "Mama, remember –

[1:10:00]

when," blah, blah, and that type thing. So I'm proud of my early beginning in North Carolina, and I'm happy that my husband was able to bring me back to his hometown. I have met so many people. I think I have made up my own little families here in Memphis. And so they are both good. There are a lot of positives that I have gotten from both areas: North Carolina and Memphis, Tennessee. But I always – I joke with my friends – I remind them all the time, my little slogan is – I'll tell them –

[1:11:00]

sometimes they'll say, "Oh, here goes Pat with, 'You know I'm not a Memphian.' " But it's a little joke that we have in that I want to remind them – because I try to still hold onto my early beginnings, and I let them know that I'm not a Memphian, but I have adjusted to and have adopted Memphis as my second home.

Rodtavis Miller:

Well, you mentioned children earlier. So is there any advice that you would like to give young people of today in South Memphis?

Patricia Lacey:

I would just love for young people to be like all of you whom I have met today, to be open –

[1:12:00]

to listen, and have a vision and work on that vision and be a caring kind of person and work on the inside of you. Work on the inside of you, and then you'll feel good about you. Begin to feel good about you, and then you won't have to do whatever it is that you do to someone else in an ugly way. Begin on you –

[1:13:00]

the inner side, and then everything will come out on the outside in a good way. Listen. Listen and have good character. Have confidence and have that going for you, and see what one good thing could you do every day. Do something good. It may be that you'll just pass by somebody and smile. Okay? Somebody, just a smile may make a difference. Okay?

[1:14:00]

Is that a promise?

Rodtavis Miller: Yes, ma'am. Well, the last thing, is there anything else that you would like to add that we haven't gone over?

Patricia Lacey: No. I would just like to thank you.

Rodtavis Miller: Well, thank you for participating in the Crossroads to Freedom Project.

Patricia Lacey: Well, thank you.

Rodtavis Miller: Okay. Let's talk about your life in South Memphis. Okay. This first question will be is exactly what does South Memphis mean to you?

Rodtavis Miller: South Memphis has a strong meaning to me because upon knowing that – when I came to Memphis, South Memphis was where my husband brought me because he had lived in South Memphis.

[1:15:00]

And that's all I know. In 1960 when I came here – it has a strong meaning. I've met people. People were within the community. I lived at his home address one year, and I was able to connect with the physical and the emotional aspects of that community. There were businesses that were operated by the community people. Basically the Negroes in the community had a barbershop, a grocery store, and there was a school –

[1:16:00]

right across the street from where my husband had been raised. Memphis had, at the time when I came, a strong presentation to me that it was real good.

Rodtavis Miller: Since you mentioned that you moved down here in, basically, the '60s, exactly what was going on around that time? How was South Memphis during that time?

Patricia Lacey: As I said, within your own little area, you had enough to make you believe that you were happily satisfied.

[1:17:00]

Of course, as I alluded to earlier, we had – segregation was in full existence, so you had little – and I have come up with a quote that I call it you had little, but you had more. Because within that little

area, there was strong possibilities and those kinds of things. So your question, again, is – what is your question?

Rodtavis Miller: Like what was going on? Exactly how was life like during that time? How did it make you feel growing up during segregation? Did you feel limited to resources during that time?

Patricia Lacey: I guess –

[1:18:00]

you felt limited in one sense, but then you had not been exposed to anything else, but I believe it was beginning to happen with different generations dealing with segregation. Our foreparents dealt with segregation in one way, and then the next generation began to pay a little more attention, and it became a bigger challenge to each generation. And so I can remember when I was in high school –

[1:19:00]

the idea of segregation – your being able to not go over here, you have to stay over here – we began to question that. And then generations after my generation from high school began to challenge it more, and that is why in today's world, in your world, you are able to say, "I want to go into the," blah, blah, and you just get up and go. And then it wasn't like that for me to want to go in. There were signs that were up to remind you that you can't – if you have a certain color, you can't go into this area. So those kinds of things have –

[1:20:00]

They were affecting us in our generation, and we chose to challenge – it was a challenge for us, and we chose to try to make a difference. Okay.

Rodtavis Miller: Does that make you feel proud that you – oh okay. Does the change from then to now, does that make you feel proud?

Patricia Lacey: Yes and no. Yes, it makes me feel – because I guess as a race of people, we were wanting to be equal, have equality there for everybody.

[1:21:00]

And so that was what we were fighting for. And you asked me does it make me feel proud or sad maybe.

Rodtavis Miller: Like how that change, how does that make you feel? Are you happy about it? Afraid of it? How does it make you feel?

Patricia Lacey: Yeah. I'm happy. I'm happy about it, but I feel that a lot has been lost in the way of respect and that kind of thing. And I think if you don't have a caring for people, a respect that you show to other people then a lot is lost. A lot of good –

[1:22:00]

can continue to go on. You need to have patience and show some – everybody needs a little bit of dignity, and you need to show dignity towards people.

Rodtavis Miller: This next question is from your perspective, exactly what is the reputation of South Memphis?

Patricia Lacey: Oh. Well, I would think the reputation for South Memphis would be that you have hard-working people. Mainly blue collar workers wanting to focus as much as they can –

[1:23:00]

on education. And I think the reputation in South Memphis has been, on a scale of 0 to 10, a good 8. Okay.

Rodtavis Miller: So you're saying even though this is a good city, it's still – I'm sorry. So you're saying even though this is like a really good city, there's still a few setbacks?

Patricia Lacey: Do I feel like it's a good city?

Rodtavis Miller: But like still have a few setbacks?

Patricia Lacey: Yes, I think it's a good city, and it – yeah. It's a good city. It may have some setbacks.

[1:24:00]

And you want to know what those setbacks are?

Rodtavis Miller: Yes, ma'am.

Patricia Lacey: Okay. Perhaps dealing with our education, we may be letting – in our preparation for our young people, we may be getting out of – may not be focusing as much attention on preparing our youth so that they can easily be able to maneuver in a positive way.

[1:25:00]

I would think, educationally, many times the preparation within our schools, the skills that were existing years ago may not be existing in the curriculum at a school today. And so you have students who may attend 12 years and go through that process of marching and are not prepared to do anything because you may have some who don't choose to go to college, but in yesteryear, they were able to learn varied kinds of skills in their –

[1:26:00]

school such as barbering, males learning how to cut hair, females learning how to sew and home ec and those kinds of things. So I would think that that could be a setback, in not working in our educational program could help to make us low on the totem pole.

Rodtavis Miller: And so do you think the educational system has gone soft a little bit? 'Cause I know from when you were growing up, education had to be a top priority

Patricia Lacey: Yes.

Rodtavis Miller: So do you think the educational system has gone a little soft?

[1:27:00]

Patricia Lacey: Going a little soft, is that what you're saying?

Rodtavis Miller: Yes, ma'am.

Patricia Lacey: Okay. Well, it has changed, and it has definitely changed. Home has changed.

Rodtavis Miller: Could you elaborate on that? Could you tell me exactly how has it changed?

Patricia Lacey: How has home?

Rodtavis Miller: And the educational system, how has it changed in your eyes?

Patricia Lacey: Well, having had the experience of working with the lower – I mean the younger children –

[1:28:00]

the home – my experience had been where you were working with the student and the home was there to support you. It seems in today's world, you may not get that total support from home, which makes it somewhat of a problem or a big challenge for the school to be able to do its part. And so I think that affects the education.

Rodtavis Miller: Well, to get back on about living here in Memphis. Exactly what are some places in South Memphis that makes this a great place to be?

[1:29:00]

Patricia Lacey: All right. Now, we have – in South Memphis there is the Stax Museum. And before we get to the Stax, of course, going back to the schools. There is the college, LeMoyne-Owen College. And when I first came to Memphis in '60, there was a junior college which was named Owen College. And you may get the connection by hearing in your lifetime of LeMoyne-Owen. So what they did, they took and joined the two together, the junior college and the already four-year college, and they renamed it –

[1:30:00]

LeMoyne-Owen College. And so that was here for the students who chose and wanted to go to college, but maybe for varied reasons, they didn't leave Memphis, so they had a college right here within their environment to attend. Whereby, if I may go back to when I was raised in North Carolina, the closest college to me, black college, was in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, which was about 35 miles from me. But here in Memphis, they didn't have to go 35 miles. The people being born and raised in Memphis could attend LeMoyne College at that time. So we have –

[1:31:00]

Stax Museum, LeMoyne College, and then recently we have what is known as a farmer's market in Memphis. And the farmer's market was developed because of a need that was studied. And a study was done in an area, and it was decided that they needed to have a market. Because in a particular area, I think the zip code is

38106, and it was found that they didn't have access to grocery stores. And so a farmer's market was developed –

[1:32:00]

about four years ago. And so that is a plus for South Memphis. And prior to getting the market, it was – and I don't know if you are familiar with the term a food desert? All right. A food desert. And that's what has been given to an area that doesn't have grocery stores. And that is developing not only in Memphis, but throughout these United States, where varied areas don't have grocery stores. And so that affects our health when we are not able to buy the proper foods that we need to eat, and our health –

[1:33:00]

gets bad. Okay.

Rodtavis Miller: That's okay. Do you have anything else?

Patricia Lacey: No.

Rodtavis Miller: Well, okay. Since you stated a few assets to the community, here comes a hard question. Exactly what is the best thing about South Memphis?

Patricia Lacey: Okay. The best – you want to know the best thing?

Rodtavis Miller: Yes, ma'am.

Patricia Lacey: Okay. The best thing – okay. There are – we have churches, and they are instrumental in a spiritual way for all of us. And we are able to –

[1:34:00]

enjoy that atmosphere of attending church. We have, for the sports area, in South Memphis there is a park which is known as Bellevue Park. And I think in recent years it was given in tribute and honor to Jesse Turner, so he made a great contribution to Memphis. But Bellevue Park is something that I feel good about because it allows varied kinds of little athletic programs –

[1:35:00]

to go there and play baseball and what have you. And Aneesa Lacey's father umpires some of the games there at Bellevue Park.

Rodtavis Miller: Well, okay. Due to a few setbacks in South Memphis, South Memphis isn't exactly the perfect place to be. But what do you think would make South Memphis a better place?

Patricia Lacey: Something that would make South Memphis a better place would be – I guess this would be unique to all of us in the world. If we could begin to –

[1:36:00]

have more respect and have motives planned and try to have a purpose of improving whatever you have. If we could work together better, I think that would help all of us. But if we stay divided – you got a little group over here trying to promote something and a little group over here trying to promote something, then a lot of energy is going into it, but it's going in different ways. And I think that we need to work closer together and –

[1:37:00]

have more respect for each other and for the ideas that we might have.

Rodtavis Miller: Well, okay. And you mentioned improvements, and thankfully we do have a few improvements in South Memphis. Some of those being such as college, park. But due to those improvements, are you hopeful about the future of South Memphis?

Patricia Lacey: Yes. Yes, I am. I am, and I'm thinking now about something that – and maybe I should have shared it earlier but didn't. But it's dealing with the communities and trying to find out what is the stronghold in a community. And just last year I was on a – was participating in –

[1:38:00]

a study dealing with our schools, and there are many schools that they are trying to close. And when you have a community that doesn't have a school, then a closed school is a closed community. You know? So there again, it says to me that we need to find out what's important and then work together to make or keep that important. You know? And so I kept going to these meetings, and

a particular school that I was concerned about, it had been on the list to close, but because many of us met and we were there – we went to the board of education. We met and met and met.

[1:39:00]

They did keep that school open. So it's important for each of us, and you, as young people, please take the torch and do whatever you can in a good way to help your community so that you can pass it on to your family and friends. So it's just gonna take working together.

Rodtavis Miller:

Well, I know it's a little off subject, but I couldn't help but notice the trophy, and I wanted to ask about it.

Patricia Lacey:

Well, I didn't get it for running. [Laughs] Okay. This trophy was presented to not just me, but I received it on behalf of –

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I received this on behalf of my church and the community. This was presented to us in April of this year, April 17th. One of our leaders in Memphis whose name is Robert Lipscomb, and he was the head and the planner dealing with neighborhood improvement, redevelopment of neighborhoods. And they had a conference for three days. The second day there were 23 exhibits at Tiger Lane. Are you familiar with Tiger Lane? Okay.

[1:41:00]

And so I was asked and learned about this two weeks before the presentation and was asked would I like to represent. Because at my church I am a garden coordinator, which deals with my church and the immediate community. And so I chose and told them that I would participate. And so I gathered up information, as much detailed information as I could, and this was the end result. They had three trophies: first, second, and third. And we were presented the third place trophy. And the name of our garden is St. Augustine's Parkway –

[1:42:00]

Community Garden. And so that is what that is about. Okay. Any questions?

Rodtavis Miller:

No, ma'am. No ma'am.

Patricia Lacey: Okay.

Rodtavis Miller: It's nice though.

Patricia Lacey: Well –

Rodtavis Miller: You're all right. You can bring it out 'cause I'm pretty sure it's a few fond memories that you would like to share.

Patricia Lacey: Please. Maybe I should have said it earlier, but okay. She's smiling. Okay. I'm a clown. Kenny is nodding his head. [Laughs] Remind me to tell you something about that. Okay. And this, one of my friends took. I went over to her house and these are pictures, so you can look.

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But I started clowning, I think, after I retired from work, I believe, or maybe a year or two before I – yeah, a year or two before I actually retired because I know my co-workers helped me to come up with my stage name.

Rodtavis Miller: What was that?

Patricia Lacey: My stage name?

Rodtavis Miller: Yes, ma'am.

Patricia Lacey: Okay. You know a part of what my name is, Pat, well, Patricia. Okay. My stage name was Chatty Patty. Chatty Patty because I'm running my mouth. And I wanted Pat in there some kind of way, so my co-workers and all came up. They said, "Chatty Patty," and that type thing.

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You can. But that was some – and I think I came about with that because of little people wanting to – little children sometimes didn't have a chance to enjoy the little parties and whatever. And I wanted to make it – and I think Chatty Patty the ABC Clown, and that was what I was doing. That's why I brought this to tell. And also, I do volunteer work too. I try to keep that – I even did volunteer work when I was working, so different agencies and what have you.

Rodtavis Miller: Could you tell me some of the places that you volunteered at?

Patricia Lacey: Okay. Okay. Currently I volunteer –

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at the library, the Benjamin Hooks Library. And I've been there – I'm into my tenth year there at the Benjamin Hooks Library. As a matter of fact, they will be having the volunteer recognition this coming Sunday, July 13th. But I have volunteered at hotline, which is – I think I did that when I was working because I would go maybe like four times a month in the evening and so. Say people may call in and have a problem. Okay? And sometimes when you have a problem –

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it's good to share that problem with someone. And what would happen is that you may call in and I would answer the phone, "Hotline. May I help you?" And then you start talking, talking, talking. And then we were trained to know how to respond to you, and then sometimes I even found that person who called in to me would say, "Oh, you have helped me so much." And to myself, I'm thinking, "What have I done?" But what I did do was I had been trained to listen as opposed to saying, "Girl," or, "Boy, you ought to do so and so." So that was an interesting kind of experience –

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If you smoked, you could smoke at your workplace. Okay? But then society, the Health Department all began to realize that it was not good for you to be able to smoke. So the employers began to realize that, "Oh, I've got a problem. I've got all these people who can't be smoking anymore at the workplace." And so now they are

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I've done. I enjoy doing that.

Rodtavis Miller:

Well, okay. We're almost done. A few more questions. Okay. You said you're from North Carolina, correct? Well, how would you compare living there to South Memphis? You can keep going.

Patricia Lacey:

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have their own families, but they will often mention about – because I would take them when they were little when school would close for us in the summer, I would go and take them there and we would stay there a month. And then my husband would be here working, and then he would come a little bit later. Because I wanted them to have the experience of visiting my parents, and they got to know what it was like. And even her dad, my granddaughter's dad, will sometimes in just conversation, he'll mention, "My hometown," or, "Mama, remember when," blah, blah, and that type thing. So I'm proud of –

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Rodtavis Miller:

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Patricia Lacey:

I would just love for young people to be like all of you whom I have met today, to be open, to listen, and –

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in a good way. Listen. Listen and have good character. Have confidence and have that going for you, and see what one good thing could you do every day. Do something good. It may be that you'll just pass by somebody and smile. Okay? Somebody, just a smile may make a difference. Okay? Is that a promise?

Rodtavis Miller: Yes, ma'am. Well, the last thing.

[1:57:00]

Is there anything else that you would like to add that we haven't gone over?

[End of Audio]