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Earlice Taylor, 2007

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- Denzel:* Taking time out of your schedule to meet with us. And well, just for the record, can we have your name one more time?
- Earlece Taylor:* First of all you're quite welcome. My name is Earlece Taylor.
- Denzel:* So how was your childhood like --
- Earlece Taylor:* Ooh. Well, my childhood like, I was a minister's daughter. There's like seven ministers in my family, but we had to go to church every Sunday, Sunday school. And we went to school and then we had to work, break down boxes, and do anything that we had to do to help my daddy do his work. You know, in the evenings and on weekends. But we went to school during the day.
- Denzel:* So, being a minister's daughter, did religion play a big part of your life?
- Earlece Taylor:* Yeah. We didn't have much choice. You had to do what dad said do and sit on the front row. Thelma Shirley Earlece come on up here and sing. And we used to sing on the radio on Reverend **Bruster's** broadcast at 10:00 at night, you know when Elvis, they said he used to go, and which is really did.
- [01:02] He used to go and sit down on the floor with his legs folded. It was 11:00, Reverend W. _____ Bruster's radio broadcast on Sunday nights.
- Denzel:* So, let's fast forward a little bit. Like, how was school as an experience for you?
- Earlece Taylor:* For me it was like I thought, I was hoping school would never end because that was my only way out. My dad didn't allow us to do a lot of things that normal kids would do. So, going to school was a big thing with me. In our school, our principal and our teachers took a lot of time with you. We had a lot of activities like the Annual Show, which we did every year. We made garments. We did a whole around the world thing. And we dressed. We made clothing from around the world for that.
- [01:57]
- Denzel:* Now during the Civil Rights Movement, did any of that contribute to any event in your life whatsoever?
- Earlece Taylor:* Well, I'm sure it did because I was around. But, we didn't participate in any of that stuff because of my dad. He was gone and we couldn't go when he wasn't around because he started to work like at 6:00 in the morning. When he came home, it was like

3:00 in the evening, okay. But, I was aware of it. During the Civil Rights Movement, it was like, I guess in our neighborhood we didn't pay that much attention to it because I don't know anybody in my neighborhood that actually participated in it. We lived in a neighborhood called Klondike, which is on the north side of Memphis.

Denzel: So, did you experience any kind of racism against you or your father or any of your family?

Earlece Taylor: Well, against me, no. But, you have the bathrooms and everywhere you had to go, it had "White only." And then you'd go to the, Blacks would go to another area.

[03:00]

But, I think with me being the fair complexion that I was I didn't experience a lot of stuff because I didn't travel with a group of people. But, back then to tell you the truth, they say when you're White you're right, when you're Yellow you're mellow, when you're Black you get back. That's a little joke that was around this. Yeah, a lot of people back then know all about that. They can relate to it. Light skin and fair skin people could get into places whereas normally other Black kids couldn't because even in our school, our teachers would choose the fairest skinned kids to take the top positions and majorettes and singing because I was in everything. I had no problems at all, but I know of things that happened when you go to the restaurants they did not allow Blacks to come in the stores to eat. And I think when they did start it you could go in only on Thursdays.

[04:03]

But I would go anytime just to see what they, could they recognize me, and they never did. I could get in where I wanted to go and I got away with and I used it on the bus, when we went to school. I could ride the bus in the morning because my girlfriend's mother would pay for me. But we walked home, but on the bus, you know there's a long seat behind the driver. Well, the White people would sit there because it wasn't that many riding in our neighborhood. I would sit right there by the pole. And all of the kids I went to school with we laughed and talked all the way and White people sat right back there. I don't know what they thought. But, I never went to the back of a bus in my life.

Denzel: So, did you go to a college or university in Memphis?

Earlece Taylor: No. I left Memphis in the 11th grade. I went to Chicago and went to St. Mary's Alternative High School. Then I came back here and I went, well I went to broadcasting school in Chicago, TV and radio.

[04:54] But then I came back here and went to LeMoyne for a while for early childhood education, and I didn't finish it but I did go.

05:06 BEGIN CLIP 2

Denzel: Okay. So what would you say your current occupation is?

Earlece Taylor: I am the Executive Director of Glenview Community Development **Apartments**, Inc. That is a non-profit organization which is, our mission is to provide, to help the people preserve their integrity of their homes and their neighborhoods which is where we are, this is a historic building right here where we are. It used to be the Crippled Children's Hospital. And then a women's quarters for women could come here to stay that had problems, didn't have anywhere to go, and to provide entrepreneurial endeavors and to do youth programming and seniors.

Denzel: Okay. Did anything that happened in your life influence this particular career choice?

[06:00]

Earlece Taylor: Well, I guess as a kid I always loved antiques and old stuff. And my girlfriend's mother, which she used to help us all the time was a schoolteacher in Magnolia School, Ms. **Magnolia Bess**. Her house was full of antiques. And I would always go there to wash her clothes and to sew for her and I could sit in that beautiful old furniture and eat out of fine china, when her own kids didn't do it. So, I guess I've always had a love for it and didn't realize it. And I've always antique shopped all my life. And then I like everything old and beautiful because old stuff has value to it, to me more than new stuff.

Denzel: Why were you particularly interested you about the Glenview Community?

Earlece Taylor: Well, my cousin moved here when Blacks started moving from north Memphis, when they started building housing for out in the suburbs. There was nobody to live in them.

[07:03]

So, what they did was they forced the White people out of this area to go to the new homes by blockbusting.

And then the Black people would, schoolteachers and different ones, they could afford to move into an area like this. And they really started building houses out in Walker Homes. But I liked the area because my cousin lived here. This is where I wanted to stay.

Denzel: I know you said that they moved here when Black people began moving in and White people began moving out --

Earlece Taylor: Uh-huh --

Denzel: Can you recall any kind of conflict that this caused that either you or any of your family was involved with?

Earlece Taylor: My family wasn't involved with it, but with me doing the history of the neighborhood here, I know that there was signs out "no Blacks allowed, keep out Niggers." Bishop Mason from the Pentecostal Temple,

[08:00]

he was the first person to buy a house here in this area. And it's on Glenview. And it was for his son, which was Bob Mason. But for a whole year he couldn't move in here because they threatened him so. So, when he did move here, they burned his house and they burned the church. But as the Blacks started coming in here, they didn't just come in here all at once. They came one little street. One on this street, after a while they came in on another street. But on my street, Glenview there was a lady, **Mrs. Roseburrow** that carried a shotgun and said, "No Niggers will ever live in this area." It's all in, if you've been looking up history you're going to find that. Did you read that?

Denzel: Yes, I did.

Earlece Taylor: Yeah, that's true. So, the Blacks that live in that house now is the, can't think of her name, **Rhonda Lambert**, the Lambert family. **Loyce Lambert** is a judge now.

(09:03)

But it was her aunt's house. And the Blacks are still living in there now. But, it was a lot of turmoil in this area.

Denzel: Could you describe some of the turmoil? I mean you've already pointed out a few interesting events that happened here, but were there any more that you could think of involving key areas in this community, like the Glenview Community Center?

Earlece Taylor: Well, the Community Center, I don't think they had any trouble there. That used to be just one house originally. And all of that land was vacant. And it was used for a storage house for the Parker Mission to store clothing for when they have affairs, when they have acting things. That's where they stored everything. And then what they did was they used it for voting headquarters when they tore the house down, there was a tent there. And they went in the tent with a light to vote in that area. And this area is noted for being one of the highest voting areas in the city of Memphis. People really vote in this area.

[10:07]

Because people here are like 65 and above.

Like, 40%. So those people vote. And a lot of them are retired schoolteachers, principals, judges and all like that. But it's changed now. It's changing now.

10:25 BEGIN CLIP 3

Denzel: So, with the voting being the highest in this area, was it always like that? Was there some kind of trouble in the transition when African-Americans were actually allowed to vote?

Earlece Taylor: Well, the voting part I'm not really sure about, but I know it's always, even today. That's why all the politicians come to our neighborhood and they want us to be on their side because they know we go to the polls and vote. And this is like two neighborhoods, 38114 is where you are, but when you get down to Kyle, that's 38106. So, there's like two different neighborhoods. And people still vote, even though it's changing now to a lot of younger people and they're coming up from those apartments when they close down LeMoyne. People are coming from everywhere.

[11:10]

But then you've got a lot of other people that are starting to buy, as young people because this is one of the most diverse historic districts there is in Memphis. And our neighborhood group with the leadership under me, listed this neighborhood on the National

Register and we are landmark designated. So, that means you have to keep the integrity of your house the same from the street, your roofing, the setbacks. You know some people want to add a room on the front. You can't do that. You've got to keep that 50-foot distance in there. And you cannot change the kind of materials that your house is made out of. So, it's like, it's a wonderful neighborhood to live in. It's changed from being nice to not so nice, and its changing back now, which happens all over.

[12:01]

Denzel: So, as a historian basically for this community, and as a person that's done a lot for this community, have you come across any important events that occurred maybe during the Civil Rights Era around the '60s?

Earlece Taylor: Well here, when was Martin Luther King killed?

Joshua: 1968.

Earlece Taylor: Okay. I came here the same night that he was killed. My mother, I lived in Chicago. My mother had a stroke. She was taken to the same hospital that he was taken to. So, you know we saw it on TV before I came, but I had to get here, you know. But, on my way here, I had a big can of mace, which the policemen of Chicago had just started carrying, that big can of mace. So, I had a friend you know, so I brought my mace with me. And when I got to the airport, it was taken from me by the security. But, getting in the cab trying to get home I was afraid because when we left the airport, which is not very far from here, we heard on the radio where a guy was on Parkway was going to do duty at the Naval Base.

[13:20] And the, our National Guard beat him up. They didn't believe him. They didn't believe him.

So, it frightened me so that I said wait a minute, take me to my cousin's house. Turn left here off of **Airways**. Let's go over here on Glenview over there. So, I came, she lived in the 1800 block. But when we hit the corner there was tankers, huge tankers with people on the top of them with the guns. And I was so frightened I didn't know what to do, but then I saw guys running up and down the street with jewelry all on their arms, all kinds of jewelry. And I got in my cousin's house. I said what's going on out there? They said those guys have stolen all that stuff from **Pake's** down on Beale Street from the pawnshops. And they were selling it all up and down the street, but nobody was allowed on the street, nobody.

- So, that was one of the things I experienced right when King was killed because I came here because my mother had that and they happened to be in the same hospital.
- [14:22] But, I never him, I don't know what time he was killed, but I came in here like about 9:00 or 10:00 at night. But that was one of the worst things that I'd ever seen. It was frightening, is what it was.
- Denzel: Wow.
- Joshua: Were you an active musician during the 1960's and '70s.
- Earlece Taylor: I was a singer, but I lived, let me see that was, what year was that?
- Joshua: '68 that King was killed --
- Earlece Taylor: Okay. I wasn't living here then. I had moved here in '76. But, I've always been a singer in Chicago. I was singing with the opera group, the African-American Opera Group and then I sang with the **Charles Clancy Voices** of Melody. It' was a gospel group. So we traveled singing. But when I moved here in '76, I've always wanted to sing jazz.
- [15:21] So, I got the opportunity and I started sing jazz and blues. But, I still do concerts in churches and other places. So, all kinds of venues I do. I sing.
- 15:31 BEGIN CLIP 4**
- Joshua: What was going on in the music community during the Civil Rights Movement? Did that create a change in the community of musicians that you were in?
- Earlece Taylor: With the musicians that I was with, they never changed, not the older ones. Younger ones might have, but see I was still singing old standards. And of course, I sing the modern gospel. I do the modern gospel like the Winans and all like that. But, sing all of it but rock, I don't do rock. But I can do the different kinds of music that people can appreciate, the young ones, the kids in the kindergarten on up because I go through the Arch Program to New York. They, **Mr. Emerson Able**, you know Mr. Emerson Able, the band director for years
- [16:22]
- Joshua: Not familiar --
- Earlece Taylor: He used to play with Nancy Wilson and Isaac Hayes and all of them. Isaac Hayes was in his band when he was in high school

_____. But, those guys are still around, Alfred Rug, a lot of them are still around. And they're still playing, doing standards. And of course, they through in some, whatchacallit, dance-you-do, everybody get on the floor and dance at the end.

Joshua: Like line dancing --

Earlece Taylor: Yeah. They play some line dancing music but basically, we do jazz and blues. And of course sometimes I do some gospel in there too because people request it.

Denzel: So, it seems like you have like a very interesting life. You were in music and also you do a lot for this community, so have you met in person some famous or important people?

Earlece Taylor: Oh, yes. I sang with Ethel Waters and Bobby Short.
[17:20]

I sang with James Cleveland, the Byrd Sisters, Jesse Dixon that's on TV. Milton Bronson, Chicago, I been on the stage with what's his name from Africa? Apartheid, what's his name?

Joshua: Nelson Mandela --

Earlece Taylor: Nelson Mandela, Harry Belafonte, Sidney Poitier, Sybil Shepherd who got shows together. I went on stage with a lot of people performing, yeah.

Joshua: Wow. That's an impressive --

Earlece Taylor: Jackie Wilson, I'd take my kids. See, I could always take my kids in the backstage because somehow I could just get through to everything, even when I wasn't singing. People just let me walk through the line with Jackson Five. I went to see them one day.

[18:20]

And the line was lined up all around 47th Street back over there on _____ Street, I had the two little girls, they just let us right on in. And we got right in, in the front seat and they came in, when they finally let them in, they hit my hand and knocked a ring off and never did find the ring. They stampeded me in there. But no, I've met a lot of people, Dr. King. Abernethy, Jesse Jackson --

Joshua: When did you meet them? Can you talk about those experiences?

Earlece Taylor: Oh, Dr. King he used to come here to Memphis to Reverend Fields church, Reverend W. M. Fields, Jr., which have you ever heard of him? He was from Klondike over on Volantine. He was like a young minister and all of the ministers came to him. All of the ministers came to him. E. J. Jones, Reverend Clarence, all of us you know when you go like at one time when Black people would come in to entertain at a _____, they couldn't live in hotels. So, they used to stay in somebody's house.

[19:21]

Okay, so that person would be where everybody would go. We're going over to Tina's house. And they all would gather over there. But then there was a place in Chicago called the Evan's Hotel on 67th and off of 63rd. Now that's where all the ministers would **meet** in Chicago. And of course, it's just one big room where they all would get like sardines in the can and just do what ministers do, sit up and laugh and talk and chew the fat. So, I've been around them since I was a young girl.

Joshua: Thinking about your, I guess music career, the racial discrimination, segregation ever affect that for you? And if not you personally, how did it affect other --

Earlece Taylor: It didn't affect me for some reason. Like, I said. I don't know why. But it did others whereas they wouldn't let them stay in the hotel. They wouldn't let them eat in the dining room. I'd go in the door first because they would, they would use me like a pawn, you know.

[20:21] **Begin Clip 5**

I'd go in the door and sit down and eat and get my food. And then after a while they would come in, they would turn them around. So, I would do, I would get up and leave. I said those are my friends. And they'd look at you. So, when I'd tell them that, if they're going to let them in then I'll eat because we would all be together. But just for watching it I guess, some kind of way I travel alone all the time, and I could just, I don't know what it is. It's always worked for me, but I know of people that it has affected, where they wouldn't let people eat. They wouldn't let them stay in the hotel. **Abertina T. Walker, John McNeal**, all of us, we used to do concerts together.

And oh, in Mississippi, Abertina Walker was going there with her group, the Caravans. John McNeal was with her at that time and James Cleveland.

[21:22]

John happened to be one of my tenants in Chicago, but long before this happened, long before he was my tenant. But, they were going down in Mississippi to sing. And when they stopped, they couldn't go to change clothes. So, they had to go in the bathroom to kind of rinse off and change clothes before they get to where they're gonna sing, you know. Well, when they went in to change, they left James Cleveland in the car. And when they came back they got in the car, and she had this big old Cadillac, you know. And there was a state trooper pulled up, and said, pull over to the side.

She said I'm the great Abertina Walker. He says pull over to the side. Tina pulled over to the side, now this is a story that she told me now, and when they said get out of the car, she says officer I'm Abertina Walker from Chicago, Illinois, and we're traveling here to sing.

[22:00]

He said get out of the car, all of you. They got out of the car and they, said open the trunk. James is sitting in the back. They opened the trunk, and they started taking all of their robes and things out and clothes they're gonna wear. And here was a cash register. James took the whole cash register out of the country store. I told you about stealing. I told you about, they locked him up of course. Well, I know a lot of stories from entertainers, from me being an entertainer and you're sitting in the midst of it. Its stuff that makes you laugh, you know. And you look back and you just really have a lot of fun, talk about what happened, you know.

Joshua: Who were your role models during this time? Did you have any people whose ideology you sort of looked up to?

Earlece Taylor: For --

Joshua: I'm thinking about especially in terms of the Civil Rights Movement and just turbulence that was going on during that time. Or just in other aspects of your life --

[23:30]

Earlece Taylor: I guess I've always been a person that liked people that were strong, could stand up for what they believed in. I believe in that whole-heartedly, so I guess my dad, even though we didn't get along well. He was my role model, I think. I've never spoken this

before. But he's always been the firm and he reminds me a lot, believe it or not, reminds me a lot of your mayor, of Memphis. My dad wasn't one that talked a lot though. But, if he said something, that's it. He'd just keep on walking. But he did not argue. But, he didn't say a whole lot, but whatever he said he was gonna do, he did it regardless and I don't care what you said and what you do, he's gonna stand up to what he said he's gonna do.

[24:29]

And then Ms. Bass was my schoolteacher, I'd always wanted to have a nice pretty house like her. And of course, Mr. Scott was the cook. I always wanted to cook like him. You know there's different ones you want to do things like them, you know. And I don't know who, I've always known what I wanted to do. And what I've always done is from the things that I wanted to do, I've always and linked everything that I do. Wherever I'm doing that, I link the next thing I do to it, like the _____ that Glenview Aged Manor, Glenview CDC.

Well, I have the Tennessee Heritage Preservation Society, that's to preserve the African-American history and culture, so we do things together. Then we have the organization for inducting African-Americans of importance into national hall of fame, which is not just some big person.

[25:38]

It can be a schoolteacher. It can be the barber, the people that are role models for you and your neighborhood. And we induct them into the hall of fame for all the things they've done to help people in the community. In my singing of course, Nancy Wilson, Sarah Vaughn, Della Reese, I like all of the different singers. Aretha Franklin, you can just go, Lou Rawls, I like them all.

Denzel:

So would you have like any advice for people of my generation today?

Earlece Taylor:

Yes. Stay at school, but not just stay in school, you need to learn everything you can, read as much as you can, research everything that you can. Be a person that has integrity and stand up for what you believe in, but believe in something. Don't let somebody else determine your destiny. Be the person that you know that you should be and you want to be, no matter what. Sometimes it's gonna be hard. But, you go back to it when you stray away from it.

[26:46]

Denzel: Well, I really appreciate you taking the time out to do this. We, on behalf of the Crossroads staff, really appreciate your cooperation and taking time out of your schedule to complete this interview.

Earlece Taylor: Well, thank you very much. I'm so glad you thought of me.

[End of Audio]