Memphis Stories: Rebecca Hutchinson

Rebecca Hutchinson Audio

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South Memphis, public housing, Foote Homes, Calverta Ishmael, Metropolitan Baptist Church, community organizing, Vance Junior High, Cotton Carnival, African American history, education, family unit, neighborhood changes, community impact, historical landmarks, social activities.

SPEAKERS

Speaker 2, Speaker 1, Clay_Charity, Speaker 3

Speaker 1 00:00
So just start with introducing just introduce yourself. Tell us you know where you're from, you know how you grew up, and we'll start

Speaker 2 00:10
there. My name is Rebecca Matlock Hutchinson, and I am a native Memphian. I grew up in South Memphis. I grew up the first, I guess, part of my childhood in Foote Homes, public housing development in the I'm a child of the 1960s and I went to Foote and clay, but homes kindergarten, which was at at one at one time, I think it was at Mississippi Boulevard and Danny Thomas. And right now that is where the senior citizen housing that just opened is standing right there I went there. Miss calverta Ishmael was the founder of the kindergarten, and she was also one of the first people to move into foot homes. And she's, she's also one of the first African Americans on the board of directors for the Memphis housing authority. So if you go in the boardroom now, you'll see a big photograph of calverta Ishmael on the wall there, and and I really so I was one of her students. I graduated from the kindergarten there. My brother graduated from the kindergarten there. And my parents lived as a young couple, first with my grandmother on St Paul. And so when I came along, they moved into an apartment, a one bedroom apartment in foot homes, and then when my brother came along, they moved into a two bedroom apartment at 640 4d Mississippi. My father would never let me forget that address. It's almost across the street from where the fire station is now, and I saw a photograph not very long ago of myself on a little tricycle, yeah, in the backyard of the apartment complex, and it was just great. I mean, I went to the kindergarten there, then I matriculated to George Avenue Elementary School, which is right across the street. So I walked over there, and Mrs. Mary Cole was my first grade teacher, and we just had a, you know, growing up in the 60s, I liked it now that I think back on it, I looked at it. Life was so much simpler. Kids played outside. We played in the dirt, we played marbles. We created our own games. We played pop the whip, we played jacks, we hop scotch. We drew our own hop scotch in the in the sidewalk. We created. We played marbles. We just, we just, we were just very we were creative. What we didn't have. We made up and we, I don't remember being without. I don't remember being poor, and I just don't we always had what we need, even though we lived in a public housing development and there were two parent households. My dad was there, and then our

next door neighbors, there's a father and a mother. So we had two parent households, and one of my mother's oldest friends recently passed away, Ms Clara, that's two parent household. Her and her husband raised their seven children in foot homes, and she also helped to raise me and my brother. Because when my mom was working, she'd take us right down there to miss Clara's house, and she would keep us, so she was kind of like the neighborhood daycare center, if you will. And because she kept a lot of the kids in the neighborhood, and we all kind of grew up together, you know. And during the summer times when we were there, the park services came. There was a park down there, and the park services would come and they bring lunch, brown bag lunches. And we would we would play. They had folk that were working for park services that facilitated the games and the activities for all the kids. We didn't have to pay. We just went, you know, and then lunch would come in this huge truck, and then we would get our lunch. We eat our lunches there, and then we leave, you know. And so everyone was just, it was just good fun. And I attended church in South Memphis, my home church, Metropolitan Baptist Church. Church on Walker Avenue. We're about five generations at that church. My grandparents were married by the Reverend Samuel, Augustus, Owen sa Owen, and my parents were married by Reverend Owen, and then I got married at Metropolitan church as well. So the generations continued at Metropolitan and that's home. Metropolitans home. You know, my mother went to Booker T Washington High School, so she was from the neighborhood. My, her, my, my grandparents raised their five children on Williams Street, somewhere around there. And they all went to Booker T Washington. All graduated from there. One of my aunts went to Lemoyne oin college. And so it was, it was just, oh no, you know the the closeness of the community, you never felt like you didn't have anything that you I didn't feel that we were without. We lived around people that we could look up to, our teachers, professionals. There were attorneys. My mother talks about, you know, she and Maxine Smith grew up together, you know, and they were all friends of a certain generation of African Americans in South Memphis. They all knew each other. And gradually, and like Maxine Smith and my mother and Benjamin Hooks, they aren't you a W Willis. They were all that that generation. They were all living together, all next door to each other, went to school with each other, and they just, they just grew up together, right? And where their children were raised together as well. So we all played with each other, or that generally, they played with each other. So that was just a wonderful thing about being in South Memphis. I should have to say South Memphis. You know, in Le Moyne, Owen college. And at that time it was Le Moyne, and then there was Owen College, which was on Orleans, which is where Vance Junior High used to be. And I went to Vance junior high when it was first built. It's no longer standing, but I think around 1968 Lemoyne and Owen college merged, and Owen college was named for Reverend sa Owen, who was the pastor of Metropolitan Baptist Church. And so you have, there's so much history in South Memphis. It's the oldest part of Memphis, you know. And then I remember, too, when I was real little, my mother used to take me up to th Hayes and son funeral home on Lauderdale, which is between two churches, was between two churches because there was a fountain there with water in it, and it had gold fish in there. And so my mom would take me there as a little girl, just to look at the goldfish. And I just had a good time looking. They're just simple things, you know, looking at the goldfish swimming around in the in the fountain at at th Hayes and son funeral home and, and that's another historical landmark that no longer standing but th haz and son who owned that and, and one of the early African American businesses in the community. And then you had Rs Lewis's son Funeral Home, which is still in existence, you know. And they, they buried everybody, you know, between thj and RS Lewis, they had lockdown on African Americans in this community, right? And then too, I mean, one of the things I don't know how many, how well known it is about Rs

Lewis, but he embalmed Dr King's body and prepared his body to return to Atlanta when he was assassinated, you know. And there are photographs in the funeral home, right in the, in the in the in the lobby of the funeral home that show people going in there and viewing Dr King's body, right? And so that's a part of this great history, too, of our neighborhood. I just, I, I loved being a kid in South Bend. I probably didn't feel that way now then, but now that I look back on it, it was just it was such a fun time to simplify life. We didn't have the. The technology, of course, that you have now. We didn't have all these games, but it made us to that made us creative, made us it forced us to be creative as little kids, it forced us to learn to play with each other and to socialize with each other. Because we weren't the we didn't all of us didn't have a television set, and if we did, it was black and white, and so we the television was not a babysitter for us. But, you know, and I just didn't think about the television set. We were one of the families that had a TV right? And I remember, I think this is actually after we moved away from from South Memphis and we moved into another part of Memphis. But no, we moved to another part of South Memphis, and the Jackson Five came on right on the Ed Sullivan Show. And so we've said, color people on TV. COVID, all the kids came in our living room to look at the Jacob five television on our black and white television set. Because everybody didn't have a TV set, right? So it was just, I just enjoyed. All I can say is, it was a great time being a little kid right growing up and at Metropolitan Baptist Church Vacation Bible School every summer was was wonderful. We had two week vacation Bible school, and I remember at the end of each day, as we would leave the building, we would metropolitan has a beautiful gym. You know, we after we leave the gym, they would give us these dream sickle ice creams from Diamond ice cream that was down the street at the corner of Walker and collagen Walker. That was the best ice cream. That was the best I've never had any ice cream like that. It was a black owned ice cream parlor, and they made the ice cream there. It was so good. It was so good. So, you know, we couldn't, so if you didn't come for Bible study, for anything else, vacation Bible school, you can't walk the dream sickle ice cream that we got. And just to I think about being raised at Metropolitan Baptist Church, and the great people that we were able to meet and to just sit at the feet of, you know, Mr. TR McLemore, who was, oh my gosh, Mr. Macklemore was a trustee at Metropolitan church, but he was also a trustee at Le Monde College. He was a huge supporter of the school, a major fundraiser. I think there's a room named after him. And at the mornin on college, and his wife taught there. And I believe Mrs. Mrs. McLemore, if I'm not mistaken. She went to NYU back in the day, an African American woman who went to NYU New York University. She was brilliant. So we were surrounded by brilliant people who were who were making major change in our community, in our neighborhood, that we got a chance to see. And I'm glad that I was able to actually listen to Dr McLemore, because he died at the age of, I think, 103 and so I was an adult, and I was on the Board of Trustees for Metropolitan church too as a young adult, and so I was able to sit and listen to him talk and speak, and just to hear him just was just absolutely amazing. And then Dr Lofton as well, Fred C loft Dr, Fred C Lofton, who was the pastor that I grew up most. I guess part of my adulthood was under Dr essay on but I remember mostly Dr Lofton as a probably a pre teen, up into my adulthood, these individuals who had such a profound impact upon us and our spiritual growth as as young People and growing into young adults as well, and a lot of us, I no longer attend metropolitan but it's still my home church. So when things happen over there, when there was a special occasion, I go over there, and my friends are there, you know, we all grew up with each other and and it. It. It happened that many years later, I married a man who is a pastor, and he pastored, at the time, an historic church in South Memphis, right down the street from where I grew up, right First Baptist Church Lauderdale, and the church is next door to where th haz and son once stood, and it's right across the street from Booker T

Washington High School. And I just kind of feel like I've come full circle, you know, because I married this man And now and now I took a leap of faith and started and left my job with the city of Memphis to accept a grant funded position to work in my neighborhood, to become a community organizer in this community. And it was not just a leap of faith, but I just feel like I was following my spirit to do this, because this is not being, being the founder and Executive Director of Community Development Corporation, score, CDC, it's not just a blessing, but it's also my Mission, and this is my ministry, if you will. So to work in the neighborhood that I came out of, that I grew up in, that I have seen changes of this does not look anything like the community that I grew up in. It doesn't but it's still my neighborhood, right? And so I feel, yeah, I've come full circle now, right? Georgia Avenue Elementary School continues to stand. It's empty now. There's not happening. There's nothing happening there at the moment, is vacant, Porter junior high, where some of my friends went, is vacant. But hopefully that won't last for long. There's something going to be happening over there, which is a part of the the revitalization and this whole Renaissance period that this whole community is going through lots of changes, the demolition of foot homes and clay burn homes and rebuilding that from the ground up into something different, something New, hopefully something better for the residents of our community who want to live there. And this is downtown, and now, you know, because it's right on the cusp of downtown, sometimes it's South Memphis, sometimes it's downtown, depending on what's happening, right? But it's, it's the changes are just phenomenal. You know, the building across the street from where I live used to live on Mississippi Boulevard is is a nonprofit as well, a nonprofit that my husband helped to found when he was pastor of First Baptist saunderdale, because they purchased that building under his leadership, and it's next door to a building that used to be a movie theater, then it was a restaurant, I guess. Then it was a motorcycle club, then it was a restaurant. Again, it was a furniture company. And the interesting thing about that is that I remember my mother bought our stereo from that furniture company that used to be across the street in that building where we scored CDC, put a mural on the south side of that building. We had a mural installed there and dedicated this year, this spring, and I remember the men walking across the street carrying that stereo. And we you know, I still have it. I still have that stereo in my mother's house. I still have that stereo circa 1960 Yes, I think it's like, yeah, you know what? My mother liked things that were different. So a lot of stereos were like, they were rectangle, long and narrow. This is a coffee table that's octagonal shaped, and it has a drawer that pulls out, and that's where the turntable is, turntable and radio is in it, yes, so I've never seen anything like that in my whole entire life. I've never seen the stereo, but that's what my mother. The guy, and it's very, very, very heavy so, and as I said, I still have it, you know, in my mother's house. So that's one of the really great memories I have of seeing them walking across the street with that. And whenever I drive up and down Mississippi. I think about that. I think about where our apartment was. And I think about, you know, the the, actually, the Asian family that lived across the street in in what is now a building owned by Metro, by first Baptist Lauderdale. It used to be a grocery store. It's been a grocery store owned by an Asian family, and they lived there, you know, they lived in a part of the place, the building and down the street the other end of Mississippi. And Danny Thomas, there was another little grocery store. And Mr. Ralph was his name. He's a white guy, and all the kids knew Mr. Ralph. Mr. Ralph was really, really nice to us, you know, he'd give us little cookies and stuff. But then too, you also had the candy man and the candy lady in the house in the neighborhood that we would all go to. So this would be an individual that would set up a table in their kitchen, and there'd be all kinds of goodies on top of it cook big jars of cookies, pickles, candy, now and later. We used to call them now, later, it's now, now and later. I didn't know that it was now and later. I grew up and I could rewrite because of

now later. That's right. You know, really hot candy, and we could get two, four Penny cookies. You go to the candy, I'm gonna tell you, we would have, if somebody had a quarter, we'd have a part, because we would, we would take that. This is how we learned how to share too. Because that one kid would take that quarter. We would go to the candy man's house, or the candy lady house. We'd get a bag of chips, corn chips, because you had a lot in the corn chips. You they had these little things that were like they were wax, and they had like little juice in them, and they looked like bottles of soda or something. We get one of those. It looked like a little six pack. We get one of those that might have been five cents. Then we get several two for a penny cookies, like 10 cents worth of two four Penny cookies. We get a package of nine letters, which were five cents, because now ladies had about about eight or eight pieces of candy in them. We'd spend that quarter, and we'd have a party, and we would sit out on the porch, and we would divide it up among ourselves with that quarter, so we'd have a party. So if somebody had a quarter, we had a lot of money. And speaking about a lot of money, I remember, too, the cotton makers Jubilee, and we call it the black Cotton Carnival. You had the black Cotton Carnival, and then you had the white card and carnival, okay, so, and it was always in May, and then the white folks would have their Cotton Carnival parade, and they'd go down Main Street. And I think their, their, it was a Ferris Wheel. They had like a carnival, if I think it was down on the river, and then the black folks car and Carnival was at Robin our church Park. And so you had you, if you had $1 you had $1 everything was a quarter, so you could get something to eat for a quarter and then you could ride a ride. You could ride three rides for a quarter piece, the Ferris wheel, the everything, I mean, and then, and then you had individual people who had stalls that made barbecue, and they would sell their barbecue. Just individual, just they didn't have a restaurant. It would just be folk who knew how to cook, and it will be a bunch of them, right? Actually, they would, they would be, they would set up right in front of where the FedEx Forum is, on that side of Fourth Street, right? They'd be set up there, maybe a little bit on what's with MLK Lennon, and you wouldn't know who to go to, because. They had barbecue ribs. Short barbecue they had barbecue bologna. You get a barbecue bologna sandwich. That was my meat eating day. I wasn't a vegetarian, and I be and that, I guess, they weren't expensive. And I would, you know, my mom, she never could make up that mess. She'd go to two different people, and so she'd get some barbecue from this person, and then she might get some barbecue baloney from somebody over here. It was the best food. It was the best food. I mean, golly, can you imagine what $1 went a long way? You know, it went a long way. And we had fun. And then cotton makers, cotton makers Jubilee, they had a parade. And all these daycare centers, African American daycare centers, would have, like competitions. They had the king and queen. So little children would be the queen, king and queen, and they be on a float. So this daycare center would have a float with their cute little kid, and little boys would have on their little crown and scepter and look and look, oh, they would be, oh yeah. They throw candy out on out on the street. We run out in the street, don't get the candy. So I forget when the Cotton Carnival, which was the white version, I guess they would have their parade, and then they had the boll weevils. The boll weevils, they had like secret societies, right? And the bold weevils, with one these were they would have these costumes, the green and gold costumes, and the boll weevils. And they would come around. They'd have this big old truck that looked like a bold weevil, I guess, I don't know. And so they would drive down the street. They would throw candy. They'd come and shake our head, and the clowns would shake our hands, little black kids white, sitting on the street, and they Okay, didn't come at us. And and then you had like, they had pages for their kings and queens and all that. And then the comic of Jubilee had a king and queen too. And so they that they had their own version of and so when they had their parade, we would have cotton make a jubilee print. But I'ma tell

you now, when Booker T Washington High School came in the parade, you couldn't even see the band members when they were walking down the street. Everybody had to follow behind Booker T Washington when they when the band came down the street during the cod maker Jubilee parade. Oh, my goodness, everybody was surrounding. Btw, band, they were bad. Oh, the major reds were awesome. Golly gee whiz. It was incredible. But you could see the band. They were folk walking all through the band, and they would be walking with the band with the drum major. And the Drum Major was made, it's always gonna be somebody tall with a big old tall hat on it had this thing, awesome. But then it was all like, I think there was like, this rival between Bucha, Washington and North Side High School, I think, I can't remember, I think, but other there was another band, another high school band that people were always gathered around. It might have been north side too and but they also, in addition to the bands, they had the little drum corps, they had the cute little little girls with the major wrist and they were walking down, they'd be strutting down the street, and then the drummers would be behind them. And so you had a whole lot of those little those little organizations they practice in various community centers or wherever. Then they come out during the parade right and all dressed and strutting down the street in their little outfits, little gold or silver outfits, and just looking all cute, with the hair all pretty and everything with ribbon and bows and out just looking good, and the boys would just sit with their drums, and they were just looking all proud. And it was just, it was just, you know, we were just full of pride to see our children doing things like that, that were that, that, that they had to have discipline, right, commitment, you know that those those type of activities taught them, those type of, those things to be, you know, to be committed to something to go to practice and rehearsal and learn, he says and pay attention. That's what that's. Was what those things, those type of opportunities, did for us when we were growing up. So that's, I don't know,

Speaker 3 30:14
just a couple of quick clarifying, yeah, metropolis, so you grew up essay. Was the pastor

Speaker 2 30:21
he was, and then Boston came directly he did. And then was he young? When Martin

30:29
got there, was he

30:30
that was 1972 73 so he wasn't that young. He was bald, I love

Speaker 2 30:41
but, but he wasn't that young when he followed. Dr, loud. Dr, Owen, or at least he didn't look I don't, I don't know how, how old I was a child. I was a teenager

Speaker 3 30:55
when he came. And then you went, you say you went to Vance.

Speaker 2 30:59

I went to Vance junior high. I went to elementary. I went to Longview Elementary, because we moved a little bit further south in Longview heights. So I went to Longview Elementary. My brother went to Alton Elementary, and then later on, as when I was older, my parents moved to Westwood and then for high school, but, but, but, even while we were in, when we were when we were in Westwood, I came my brother, my mother, brought me back here in South Memphis, and I went to Vance because she actually worked at it wasn't on college. It was, I forgot it was a teacher's something, because mom was an educator, something in the Owen building that was then a part had become a part of Memphis City Schools, and so that's where she worked. And so that was still standing when Vance Junior High was built. So I would just drop right in with her when she came to work. So that's how I came to go to Vance junior high when Dan Ward was the principal, the first principal there. And I was, I think Vance was probably about six months old when I went there. So I was one of the first students to attend Vance after it was originally constructed. And then after that, after ninth grade, I just went to Hillcrest, which was a community school. I wanted

Clay_Charity 32:36
to ask if you could, you mentioned a lot of things, but just if you could think of some specific things about South Memphis that have prepared you to do community organizing like any, you know, not necessarily large scale, but small scale community organizing groups in South Memphis that just organized around one thing or another, that kind of, you know, like you said, when we reflect on the things that we were exposed to, we realized, oh, this was just something that I grew up seeing, that I didn't realize was special. But do you recall just any, any examples of community organizing in South Memphis, not official? I know what

Speaker 2 33:17
you mean. I know what you mean. I Yeah, you know, I have to think, you know, Metropolitan has such a profound impact on me, right? And just seeing people like Maxine Smith, who's the national secretary of the NAACP, and wanting to be like a Maxine Smith, and seeing the things that Maxine Smith did, you know I was a little kid and would see Miss, Miss Maxine right her and Andrew letter, Hawkins Jones, folk like that, and I already mentioned Mr. TR McLemore, it was, it was the people that impacted me the most, and seeing the type of work that they were doing that impacted the city, and just being exposed to them and see that rubbed off on you. And also, you know Mary Cole Nichols, you know folk like her and her brother, Kenneth Cole, folk who were doing great things in this city, who had influence you want to be like that. That's what impacted me, that I have to say, that helped to shape me into being somebody who wants who cares about her community, and who wants to do something impactful to improve her. Her neighborhood, her city. That's, that's, that's what I would have to say. That's what did it for me, you know, just I was surrounded by some phenomenal people, you know, and that's, I would have to say, that's, that's, has got to be the biggest thing that impacted me, that has influenced me in what I do now. Did that answer your question?

Clay_Charity 35:29
Because I'm going to jump around Sure. Can you explain to people the Cotton Carnival and how the cotton makers Jubilee kind of presents as a response or an alternative, because that, you know, that's, that's something that's kind of interesting,

Speaker 2 35:47
you know, Dr r q Vincent. And there is a senior citizen high rise. It's named after Dr r q Vincent. It's at the corner of Bill Street and Danny Thomas. It's named after him, dr, ah Q Vincent, one of the early physicians, I think he was a physician here in Memphis. He started it. This was, this was his brain child, because, as an alternative, because to cotton, because you're celebrating cotton, and that's what the Cotton Carnival was, you know? And for him, he saw this as an opportunity for African Americans, yeah, you know, we picked the cotton, but we also contributed to the economy, the economy of this city, in the work that we did. And we need to be celebrated too. We have great people doing great things in our neighborhood. We have our own kings and queens, and that's where he started that. Now I don't know you know the full history behind that, but I do know that it was Dr r k Vinson that did that, and that started that. And he got the support of a lot of the other influential African Americans in the city. George W Lee, I think aw Willis, I think just just just a lot of other prominent African Americans. Universal Life, oh, my goodness, and the universal life. Walker, Dr Walker and Jane Walker, yeah, these kind of people who were influential and supported that effort, and supported that effort, yeah, I think that that was just kind of alternative to that, and it lasted for many, many years, many generations. And I think that there is an effort to kind of maybe bring that back to some degree, but at least to talk about that history, to preserve that history, because that is so important. It's a part of the African American history of Memphis that we need to know about, that we need to we need to preserve. Yeah, do you recall the years that

38:33
you remember going, Mm, hmm,

Speaker 2 38:35
it was an, I remember, I was a child of 60s. So it was in the 60s, I would say 1968

38:50
through 1971

Speaker 2 38:58
are The years that I remember the most, maybe maybe 74 No, maybe 74 I remember going down there with my dad. Yes, I you know what I'm gonna tell you what? I don't know if you're gonna use this, but I was 14 years old, and I was with my father, and we were at, we were at the cotton make a jubilee thing. And I think, you know, I was holding my dad's hand, and we were standing in front of one of the games, and he had those little carnival games, and this man said, Oh, sir, do you want your girlfriend to play? I was so insulted. I moved her. Said. I moved my head away from my daddy, and I turned around and I walked away. I said, How dare you call me his girlfriend. That's my daddy. I'm a 14 year old, so 1974 I remember. And. Interesting. What makes you remember certain years I remember because I was 14 years old, I said, Oh my gosh. So that problem is the last time. So mad. But, yeah, so those, those are the years, yeah, but, but now I tell you that barbecue, those folk looking at barbecue that was, that was in the 60s and the 70s. I know that early 70s, yeah, talk a little bit

Speaker 1 40:29

about about your parents. Were they born and raised in the fish? Did they move here? You know, what kind of work did they do? And, you know, again, how that how living in the foot homes kind of shaped your to the extent that you have more things to say than

Speaker 2 40:48
you said before. Absolutely. My father was born and raised in Little Rock, Arkansas, and he came here to Memphis because his one of his brothers lived on McLemore, Uncle Lawrence. Lawrence McLemore, who act but who actually owned us a they called it the post office. He owned a store on Beale Street. He owned uncle Lawrence had uncle Lars and Aunt LaVista. They owned a store on Beale Street. And so my daddy moved to Memphis because his brother was here. My mother was born and raised here, and they met at Metropolitan church, and Mrs. Gleason, as my mother told me, introduced them, right? And so they were married, and then they lived with my grandmother, who had a big house on St Paul, and I think it was a rooming house, she would rent out some of her rooms to people that that house no longer stands, but it was somewhere it was on St Paul, and so they lived there with grandmama until I was born, until I came along. And I need to back up a little bit, because my mother, when she graduated from Book of Washington, she moved to New York, and she had a sister who lived in New York, and she went, she followed her sister, and the two of them were living in New York, and I think when my grandfather became ill, my mother returned to Memphis from New York, and she helped. I helped her grandmother, and so she stayed here, but my aunt, she continued to live in New York until the age of 93 when she passed away. But so my parents, my mother was a stay at home mom, and my father worked, he worked at Universal Life Insurance Company. I think it was a door to door salesman for a point, and then he worked at John Gaston hospital. That's where all of us were born. If you were black, you were born in the 60s and the 50s, you were probably born at John Gaston Hospital, which is now the regional Med, or the Med, or whatever. And so, so dad worked there, and then later on, they were able to, mother started going to school. She was trying to, because she went to college in New York, but she didn't finish her degree. So he's trying to finish it here in Memphis. And so they I guess one of the things just growing up in South Memphis that is particularly over in Foote Homes, even though it was public housing, you didn't really feel like it was public housing. I didn't feel that I was ostracized or any less than anybody else because I was in public housing. I don't even know if I knew it was public housing. I just we lived in the projects. That's what we call it. We was the projects. And I think what helped to shape me was just seeing the sense of community that we had because other people could, could chastise your child, your child, I was a good Girl. I didn't want anybody telling my mama that I did something wrong, because folk would tell on you and and I think it was just that people really cared about each other, even even now, because the folk former residents of foot homes, they. Still have a gathering once a year. So I think it was that sense of community, the sense of togetherness, that that that impacted me and and wanting to continue that right. I think it was also for us. For me, it was education. Was important. Learning. We had teachers that cared about us. Mrs. Cole cared about us. That's, I mean, that's where I learned to read. Susan, flip, run, flip, run. Those are the book Tom and Dick and Betty and Sue and flip and and all of that. And then that's where I learned the 23rd psalms in Miss Mrs. Cole's first grade classroom. Because every morning when we would say the Pledge of Allegiance, and we would also sing, say the 23rd Psalm. So we also learned, had a sense of spirituality, if you will, also in school too, but as well as the church and all of that impacted me and the kind of person that I became, you know, and I mentioned education, because I saw my mother constantly going to school part time. For years, my mom went to school part time, and

she eventually graduated from it was Memphis state when she graduated, right and and getting her degree in education, and then she went on to become a teacher. But I was surrounded by teachers. I was surrounded by educators. Her her youngest sister was a teacher, an educator, and then you had even, even folk, even in in kindergarten at foot and clay at home, kindergarten with Miss calverta Ishmael, just the lesson that learned, and then the discipline that they instilled in us as little children. It that impacted me too. So I just that, yeah, what

Clay_Charity 47:26
kind of, you know, getting to middle school and high school and stuff, what kind of activities were available to y'all? And you know, what did you What did you do? Okay,

Speaker 2 47:40
and in junior high. Yeah, we call it junior high, but yeah, you're right. Middle school, I was, oh my goodness. I was advanced. Junior High. I said I was on the tennis team. Yes, I did. I was on the tennis team. I played tennis. I was we were academically challenged so teachers, because we had such a strong principal, Mr. Dan Ward, who had high expectations of us, who had high expectations of his staff, his teachers and he was no joke, and so that just being being exposed to that so I was, I was academically, I was a I was a pretty good student. I was a really good student, and I was just in, I can lots of little clubs in junior high school. And then when we moved to Westwood and I became I went to Hillcrest High School, same thing, but now Hillcrest was different, because that was court ordered. I was a part of court ordered bussing right in the 1970s so now for the first time, I'm attending school with white kids. Now I have to say this, let me, let me go back. St Peter's No, what is it not? St Peter's the Catholic church, St Patrick Catholic church, they adopted Vance junior high, so some of us were able to go to st saint. What is it? Oh, it was a Catholic girls school. St, Dominic is the boys school. What is it? Dominic? St, Anne, because I know it. Was, it was, what is that? That it was, oh, my, any other time I could, I would be able to, why can I remember that? I guess, with age, but it was a Catholic, Catholic girls school on Walnut Grove Road, and I went there for the summers. And I probably could have gone there and gotten a scholarship and go there, but I was, I didn't want to, because why did Saint Ooh, I'm really mad. But anyway, but I went there for two summers, and that gave me a lot actually, it helped me out a lot because I was ahead of the all the other students, a lot of the students, I shouldn't say, a lot of the students, academically, st Agnes Academy. That's what it was. I went to St Agnes Academy for the summer. So what we would do, a lot of the they had a lot of kids from over here, and we would meet. We would meet over Hey, we would meet over at St Patrick's, and we would play around the little playground until this big yellow school bus would come around 830 and pick us up and would take us to st Agnes, st Agnes Academy. So I was able to go to st Agnes Academy for two years, just for two summers, and and that really that that was a great but I was, I'd never gone to school white kids before, and these were rich white kids. And so that had I was, I got along well, it was great, but I didn't want to go to school there during the school year, and they actually offered me a scholarship. That was like, but I know better. I was like, I don't want to go here, but I could have, I could have gone there. I didn't go, but that's okay. That's okay because I went to Hillcrest High School and because I had gone to, I had done the summer school at St Agnes Academy, I had been exposed to white students and going to school then, but I was still it was still different, you know, still different coming from Vance junior high and Going to, going to Hillcrest High School. Ooh. But in terms of what I was involved in, I made sure that I got involved in every organization that there were white people in, so that there would be no white

people that so there will be no organizations that did not have one, one, any, any that were all white. So I became a member of the chess club, and could not play chess. I became a member of the math club, which was a whole bunch of white boys. They ignored me, but I stayed there. I was I was in the Honor Society, and then and I, but I wasn't, oh, and I was in the band. I was in a band at Vance junior high. I played the flute. And then I was in the band at Hillcrest High School, and I played the flute there too. So those are the kinds of things that I was involved in. I just wanted to make sure that, you know, there were, there were no all white organization. Organizations in the school. So I wasn't an activist, right? But in my own way, I did that, I guess, in a very subtle way. So I was like, oh, there's all white people in the chess club. I'm gonna be in the chess club. I said, always okay. And I work really, really hard to be in the, you know, academically, to be in the Honor Society, right? So, because I was in the Honor Society, advanced junior high, and then I was an honor society at Hillcrest, and I was the only black student in the honor society the first time. And then first year, and then that second year, my junior year, I guess there were a couple of couple of us more. So that's, that's, that's that I was.

54:39
So when you finish so when you finish high school, then, then what would you do

Speaker 2 54:44
when I finished high school, I received the Congressional Black Caucus nomination from then it was harrow for senior congressman, Harry Ford, senior to attend Oberlin College. So I went to Oberlin College, which. Was in Ohio, which was another culture shock, that Oberlin was totally different from anything I'd ever been involved in, right? But I met a lot of great people. But you know, then, you know, Oberlin was, like, called, considered the bastion of liberalism, right? So you had a lot of liberal white folk. And you had, you know, African American students there who were, you know, really, you know, black nationalists and and I know what a black nationalist was, you know. And then you had, you know, apartheid, you know, you know, free, Nelson, Mandela and all that. Because, right? So, so Oberlin, I went there, and I couldn't afford to stay there, so I sat out for a couple of years, and I worked and I saved my money. I didn't want to go any place else, so I went back. I was determined to graduate from Oberlin College, and by any means necessary. So if I if it meant that I had to sit out a semester and save my money and go back, which is what I did, that is exactly what I did. So I say that I got my undergraduate degree in a piecemeal fashion, but I was gonna, but I'm my best friends, my bestest, bestest friends, and we still communicate with each other, right? We're from college, Oberlin, college, right? And so at Oberlin, we were I was involved in a lot. I was involved in abusua, which was our black student organization there. I lived in African heritage house, which is we had program dorms at Oberlin. So you had the African heritage house, you had Russian house, you had all kinds of stuff, and, and, and so it was, it was just, it was, it was such an eye opening experience. A lot of my friends were from the New York area, and a few from Ohio, mostly from Chicago, New York, the Midwest, that that area, so that that was, that was a profound impact on Me. Yes, so what brought you back to Memphis? I My mama and I think what it was, my grandmother was ill, and so excuse me. So I just, I have a I was committed to helping my family, right? So I was supportive of my mother, and so I just came back. I just came back and just started working, and just working at various jobs, and went to graduate school at the University of Memphis, and got a master's degree in public administration and worked for the city of Memphis for a bunch of years, and that, that kind of thing. Yeah,

Speaker 1 58:09
when you came back, what were some of the major changes from the neighborhood you grew up in to the neighborhood you returned to

58:21
when I graduated from college, is that what you mean? Yeah.

Clay_Charity 58:24
Like, Well, you say you grew up in South Memphis, and then when you came back, because, remember, you said earlier that it's not the same. So what were the biggest things returning this?

Speaker 2 58:36
Like, you know what? It wasn't when, okay, now, when I came back from college, foot homes and clay and well clay, but homes and foot homes were still there, right? They were still there. But I graduated from high school college in the 80s, 8086 86 and you didn't believe it or not people in foot homes and clay man homes, a lot of them really cared about their their space. So you would have little white picket fences where people had beautiful gardens and flowers. All that was gone. The white picket fences were gone, the yard of the month, if they had that that was gone, yeah, they had, they had little competitions, right? Because you had people with big flowers, and they took care of it. All that was gone, and foot and clay bird homes, kindergarten, the building was still there, right? But Miss calverta Ishmael was gone, right and put a pin there. When we were growing up, we called her Miss ishaman Because as children, we didn't know how to say Miss Ishmael. It wasn't until. I read her, her death notice in the newspaper, and I said, Ishmael, Ishmael. I thought it was Miss isherman, but anyway, but it was that now you did not have Vance advanced. Junior High was still there, but Mr. Ward was gone. It just I felt that it had deteriorated. I felt that the family unit had deteriorated because you did not have you didn't have fathers and mothers and husbands and wives raising their children together in foot homes and enclave homes like it was when I was growing up. So you didn't, you didn't have that anymore. And I didn't come over here very often, if I came over here at all, because I just didn't have any reason to come over here. Because at that point, you know, as a young adult, my life was, was working for the city of Memphis, and it was, it was just hanging out, maybe with some of my friends every now and then, I was a home body. So I just stayed at home, and I just, you know, I was young I was young adults. I just did what young adults did. And so this was not an issue. I didn't care, right? I didn't, because it wasn't but I was still going to Metropolitan church all this while, so I'm still seeing what's going on because and then because I was over by Lemoyne gardens. That's where metropolitan was, right by Lemoyne gardens. And so I saw a lot of the deterioration in Le Moyne garden. And sometimes we would go and Canvas Lemoyne gardens. Every now and then go into a few of us from Metropolitan we would go out into the neighborhood. Wasn't often when I went, but there were some that did that, that would see that. So it was, it was just, it was, you know, it was just the feeling was different. The family unit wasn't there, the closeness, the care for each other, as you know that that wasn't there anymore.

Clay_Charity 1:02:30
Going back, can you think of some institutions of South Memphis like say that again, institutions like, whether it be businesses or some of the churches you mentioned, or different, you know, restaurants or

establishments. Can you think of some of those? Because, again, you know, going in the archives, things that people might have forgotten, was there that you remember just being important or significant to the identity of the community?

Speaker 2 1:02:58
Okay, Wendy, you have, right over here on George Avenue, what was club paradise? So that that that is huge, that has gone through various owners, which is an institution of itself, which is a whole different story, right? Because it has its own set of history. So you had that. Then you had, as I said, you had the there was a fire station at the corner of Mississippi and E, H, C, C Boulevard. That was the first fire station the African American firefighters. I'm not sure if there's a marker up there. There should be an historic marker up there. But right now, you know, they tore that down. And so there is a car lot there, but, but that, that was a, you know, and my cousin's father was one of the first African American firefighters, George Dumas, and I think that he was at, he was stationed at the firefighters at the one on, it was on Mississippi, yeah, Mississippi. And so you had that, that fire station that was there at that corner across the street now from a auto repair shop on the other side of the overpass. Of course, you got Booker T Washington High School, where everyone, if you were on this side of South Memphis, you attended that school. And then you had, oh, the movie theater, the Georgia Avenue movie theater, which is at the corner of Mississippi and and Georgia, right across from Booker T Washington is where score CDC has installed its mural. It was, it was a, it was built as a movie theater. So you, I think you had two African American movie theaters. You had that one, and then further down. Down at Mississippi and Walker across the street from where the fort way restaurant now stands. There was a movie theater there too. I don't remember the name of it. Is what the Ritz? Oh, I didn't know that. Okay. Well, see that was before my time, but I know that. I knew that. That was I knew that. And you know what to I'm sorry. I'm just and then, you know, just, just right up there at Mississippi in Walker. They used to call that the curve. And I believe the reason they called it the curve was because the trolley went down there in the early 1900s the trolley went down there, and that's where it turned. It would curve, and it would go back in the opposite direction. So they called it the curve. So anyway, that's something for your students to look up. But other institutions, I would have to say, the foot and clay homes kindergarten that Miss calverta Ishmael. And just, just about Miss caliber Ishmael is another, she's another historical figure that I think people should know about as well, calverta Ishmael. And then you had, oh, my goodness, of course, Vance junior high that doesn't stand and that's not standing anymore. And you got the historic churches, which St John Vance down the street, Mount Nebo next door, and of course, Clay burn temple down the street, RS Lewis's son, funeral home down the street. And then th hazing son that used to stand next door to that was between two historic churches. You got Mother Church, mother church of God in Christ. It wasn't the original, I think Dr, dr Boyd corrected me, but it is a mother church of God in Christ, some kind of in some way, if it is the first one here in Memphis or, well, that's where Church of God in Christ started, here in Memphis. So Memphis, and then chase Hayes and son was there. And then First Baptist Church in Lauderdale, which is one of the daughter churches from First Baptist bill. And first Baptist build was built by slaves, which is over on Beale Street, right? And then, yeah, so, and then the stone, the brick stone wall that's in front of First Baptist Church, Lauderdale. Now I heard story, has it that there were slaves that that constructed that now, no, I don't think so. But that's, that's, that's what some folks say, but, but they've been there for a long time, those stones, and then on Bill street, you had, my grandfather's had a shoe shop at 333 Bill and I think because I used to ask mama, what was it called? And she would say, the shoe shop, the

shoe repair shop. And my aunt used to, used to tell me that men of the day would go in there and talk about the affairs of the of the day. That was one of the more the decent places where so you had George W Lee that would go there. That's my onset. You had aw wheels that would go there. You had you had Dr Walker that would go there. And then somebody, somebody else would go there. And they would talk about the issues of the day. And then further down Beale Street, many years later, my uncle, my father's brother, had a had a sundry store. They called it the post office, and above it were the Law Offices of sugar attorney, Sugarman, H T Lockard, and I think one other African American attorney at that time. So I grew up because sometimes my father would take me down there to my my uncles and aunts, little sundry store, and so we would see, you know, H T Locker and H T Locker at the time, also we went to Metropolitan, so I kind of grew up seeing that's one of those other people that I grew up seeing. H T Locker judge. He was Judge. HD Locker was, I went as an adult. So they were in the law office above my my uncle's sundry store or post office. And I don't know what end of Beale street it was on, but it was, it was somewhere I know it was on the north side of Beale Street, I think. And so that's, that's the place. And then another landmark, I think, a place that they might want to think about is, I can't think of right right now. Oh. Ooh, the Y the Sarah Brown branch of the YWCA on Mississippi Boulevard is named after the wife of Ellie Brown. Ellie brown Park is right over here, right and so Ellie brown that's where we had our South City heritage fest there last year. Oh, this year, I'm sorry. And Ellie Brown was here teacher at Bucha, Washington. He was, he was an educator, and so his wife, Sarah Brown was a socialite of the day, right? And so, so she did a lot of philanthropic work in the community. And so, of course, they named the Sarah Brown branch of the YWCA after her. And a lot of kids would go there, and they learn that's where they learn how to play the piano, and just all kinds of great things for for for for young people. That happened at the at the Sarah Brown branch of the YWCA. So you had metropolity, you had second congregation. You had the YWCA all right there, and the morning College, another

Speaker 3 1:11:19
point of clay to circle back to my brother, McNamara. She was a church member, for sure. He was so you had interactions with him.

Speaker 2 1:11:32
I didn't really have any interactions with Mr. McLemore beyond just listening to him and speaking to him and him correcting me sometimes at the trustee board meeting, because I was on the trustee board at Metropolitan I was, I was the secretary of the trustee board, but that was just basically, I didn't really have any interactions with Mr. McLemore. I knew I knew her, when I saw her, Mrs. McLemore, but I know because, because I was pretty young when Mrs. McLemore died. So I remember her. I know her. I would know her when I see her, but I was kind of young when she passed away. Who was the past? It was Dr sa Owen, and then in 72 that's 7273 that's when Reverend Lofton came. So the first part of my childhood was Dr Owen, and the next part, and into my adulthood, was Reverend Owen. I mean, Dr Lofton, I appreciate. I appreciate. Well, thank you. I appreciate you. This was cool. You took me back down memory lane. I.