

Rhodes College Digital Archives - DLynx

Annie Williams, 2009

Item Type	Moving Image
Publisher	Rhodes College
Download date	2026-04-19 01:48:42
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/10267/33521

[0:00:00]

Paris Westbrook: If you need to, get a drink, go to the bathroom and then come back and finish or if you just wanna stop, then let us know, okay? All right. Let us know. Three, two, one, countdown. On behalf of Crossroads to Freedom, we would like to thank you for taking the time out to do this interview with us.

Annie Williams: I'm glad to do it.

Paris Westbrook: Okay and for the record, could you state your name?

Annie Williams: My name is Annie Bell Williams.

Paris Westbrook: Okay and could you state the year you were born?

Annie Williams: ____ the sixth, 1933.

Paris Westbrook: All righty and can you tell us where you were born and raised?

Annie Williams: I was born in **Haywood** County, in Brownsville, Tennessee.

Paris Westbrook: Oh, okay.

Annie Williams: And I attended high school in Brown – after I graduated from high school, I attended ____ went to Henderson Business College.

Paris Westbrook: Okay.

Annie Williams: Uh huh.

Paris Westbrook: What was it like living in Brownsville, Tennessee?

Annie Williams: It was nice. You know we walked to school, walked back and you know and

[0:01:00]

came home, did our night work and, you know, and then I worked in the field. And really, I learned how to anything. I can can any kind of food. I can cook and I know how to sew. You know, my mother taught us all of this.

Paris Westbrook: Oh.

Annie Williams: We had to know it because she always told us if we get grown we don't know what we might have to do and then if I had to do it, I could, you know, tell about it.

Paris Westbrook: Okay.

Annie Williams: So she taught us how to cook, sew. We walked five miles to school, five miles back, got home, did our night work, chopped cotton, picked cotton, canned food, you know –

Paris Westbrook: Okay.

Annie Williams: - I've been to the mountaintop on that. But you know, it was nice.

Paris Westbrook: Okay.

Annie Williams: It was nice, you know.

Paris Westbrook: What were you –

Annie Williams: The other kids were ridin' buses in. We – sometimes we had to get in the ditch. They would throw bus – mud all over us if we didn't get in the ditch, you know. They would try to but we kept goin'

[0:02:00]

so after I graduated from high school I came here and I went to Henderson Business College.

Paris Westbrook: Okay. What was it like growing up in the – well the time that you were in, like with your parents and I don't know do you have any brothers and sisters?

Annie Williams: Yes I have.

Paris Westbrook: How many do you have?

Annie Williams: I have one brother and three sisters.

Paris Westbrook: Okay.

Annie Williams: Uh huh.

Paris Westbrook: Okay what were your parents like?

Annie Williams: They was great. You know we had – we was taught, you know, whatever we had to do. Like we had to go to the field, you know, she would say, it just a – it's an education, she would tell us, she'd say, "When you grow up, you're have to – you don't know what you might have to do," you know "and then you'll know how to do it." So we was taught – we walked to school, came home, did our night work and, you know, and we liked chopped cotton, picked cotton, canned food. *[Laughter]* We did everything.

Paris Westbrook: Okay.

Annie Williams: You know, it was an experience.

[0:03:00]

Paris Westbrook: Okay.

Annie Williams: So it isn't too much that has to be done, you know, that I don't know how to do it and then as we did it, we thought it was hard and mother would always tell us, "You don't know what you're comin' to, baby." You know and I have learned that she was tellin' us the truth. So when I graduated from high school, I came down here and I went to college.

Paris Westbrook: Okay.

Annie Williams: And I've been here ever since.

Paris Westbrook: What year was that?

Annie Williams: That was in, oh Lord have mercy, I can't even think about it.

Paris Westbrook: *[Laughter]* Well what were your high school – what were your school years like before you came to Memphis to go to college?

Annie Williams: Talkin' 'bout –

Paris Westbrook: High school and middle school.

Annie Williams: Yeah, it was a high school, Haywood County. We were the ____ High School.

Paris Westbrook: Okay.

Annie Williams: That's the school we went to and when we was goin' to elementary school, we loved the school then the other kids, white kids, ridin'

buses, we would have to get in a ditch sometime then, 'cause they wouldn't even slow u to keep from throwing mud on us

[0:04:00]

sometime if we didn't get in, they'd be mud all us before we got to school, you know, and our mother would tell us, she said, "Baby, you know where you came from but you don't know where you're goin'." And I was so glad when I graduated from high school, came here and went to college and I've been here ever since.

Paris Westbrook: Okay.

Annie Williams: Uh huh.

Paris Westbrook: What were – when you first came to Memphis, what was that experience like?

Annie Williams: It was nice. It was nice.

Paris Westbrook: Okay.

Annie Williams: Uh huh, I enjoyed, you know, going to college and everything, you know, and I made good grades and everything. It was nice.

Paris Westbrook: Okay.

Annie Williams: And then I had my kids and went to college and everything. One of my sons – my son is a radiology technician. His wife is a nurse practitioner. You know they went to school and when I – when we – when I got married and we, you know, we brought 'em up, we taught 'em things that they had to do, you know, and we wouldn't just tell 'em to do, we would experience – we would tell them

[0:05:00]

what they might have to do when they get grown, you know, and they would know how to do it.

Paris Westbrook: Okay.

Annie Williams: 'Cause that's the way mother told, mother and daddy, told us.

Paris Westbrook: Oh.

Annie Williams: So chop cotton, pick cotton, pick green, can – we did it all.

Paris Westbrook: Uh huh.

Annie Williams: Uh huh and it was an experience and after I started to go into college, there were some teachers there I, you know, could tell 'bout how to do things they didn't even know –

Paris Westbrook: Uh huh.

Annie Williams: - because they weren't raised up in the country.

Paris Westbrook: Okay.

Annie Williams: Uh huh, you know and I thought it was hard but mother told us, she say, "One day you're gonna thank me for this."

Paris Westbrook: Uh huh.

Annie Williams: And I did.

Paris Westbrook: Okay.

Annie Williams: She taught us how to – we could drive car, we got home from school, we did our night work, got the coal and the wood in, did our night work and everything, 'cause I had only, you know, like one brother and everything, and I was the oldest.

Paris Westbrook: Uh huh.

Annie Williams: But it was an experience. You know we thought it was hard at that time but, you know, and since – and I was – after I got here

[0:06:00]

I was just surprised at peoples here that didn't know anything and a lotta things, you know, I worked at the Board of Education. I work in the – as _____ I monitored – yeah, _____ I worked there, we monitored all the schools in Memphis and if anybody would break in in our school in Memphis, I could hear it at the _____ and when they know anything the police would be walkin' in the school, I could tell what door to go in and everything.

Paris Westbrook: Uh huh.

Annie Williams: So it was an experience.

Paris Westbrook: Okay.

Annie Williams: Uh huh.

Paris Westbrook: After you graduated from college, you went – you started in the school system working?

Annie Williams: Uh huh. Yeah, uh huh, I worked at the Board of Education.

Paris Westbrook: Oh, okay.

Annie Williams: Uh huh, I would work – in the department I worked in was a – I worked at a desk where we monitor every school and I would be sittin' up at the board and if anybody broke in our school in Memphis, it was comin' up on there and when whoever had broken in the school – when they knew anything the police were there and sittin' there at the office, I could even hear 'em walkin' around and hear 'em open the doors, walkin' around and I could tell

[0:07:00]

'em what door they was in, what buildin' they was in and uh, when they knew anything, the police was there. They didn't know how they got there. Uh huh. So –

Paris Westbrook: How long did you work for the Board of Education?

Annie Williams: Ooh.

Paris Westbrook: Long time?

Annie Williams: Uh huh, yeah I worked there long time.

Paris Westbrook: When'd you –

Annie Williams: 'Til after I got married, you know, after I got married and everything and my children, you know, got in school and everything, I was blessed with two good husbands, 'cause my first husband died and I got married and then me and my second husband, we raised with our kid, we raised foster children. We, you know, we was always around children.

Paris Westbrook: Uh huh.

Annie Williams: And we bought this place – it's by Hale, Mississippi, you know, and we had, go to this resort, up that big – you hear of Big Buck Resort?

Paris Westbrook: Yes ma'am.

Annie Williams: We would take them up there on the weekend and everything, you know, and they would have a place they could just play ball or do whatever

[0:08:00]

my husband just sits back and watch 'em, you know. This is what and you know, I raised foster children so now on my birthday, my house be full. Kids be comin' from Detroit, Michigan, California, and I'm mama everywhere.

Paris Westbrook: Oh wow.

Annie Williams: Uh huh. Me and my husband mama. They call my husband paw paw.

Paris Westbrook: Okay.

Annie Williams: Uh huh. So it was nice.

Paris Westbrook: Okay. Did religion play a really big role in your life?

Annie Williams: Yes. Uh huh, I used to sing all the time.

Paris Westbrook: Oh really?

Annie Williams: Uh huh, yeah.

Paris Westbrook: Okay.

Annie Williams: I used to sing all the time, like my daddy played the piano and you know a lotta time they would call me to sing somewhere, I would be somewhere in the house. My daddy find me say, "Come here, madam." He said, "God gave it to you. Use it."

Paris Westbrook: Uh huh.

Annie Williams: You know 'cause everywhere every church where I went, you know, there where we live, time I get to church, "Can you sing?"

you know, like this and I'd be somewhere tryin' to hide and daddy played the piano and daddy said, "Come here."

Paris Westbrook: Uh huh.

Annie Williams: "God gave it to you, use it!" That's what he would talk, you know. You know, I thought

[0:09:00]

you know, at that time I didn't know.

Paris Westbrook: Uh huh.

Annie Williams: Uh huh. But you know I thank God, you know, and I – after I got grown, I got married, me and my husband raised foster childrens. So we was always – I was always surrounded, you know, by kids. Now, on my birthday, children come from everywhere.

Paris Westbrook: Uh huh.

Annie Williams: I'm mama and my husband has passed and everybody called him paw paw.

Paris Westbrook: Okay.

Annie Williams: And if anybody need anything – if it took his last penny – he'd, I said, "Sidney, why did you do it?" He said, "Baby, they need it. I'll get us some more." You know, that was the way it was.

Paris Westbrook: Uh huh.

Annie Williams: Uh huh. So we bought that resort, ____ up the resort, up – it's up there close to Summerville, Tennessee and we would – on the weekend, just to have a place to take the kids.

Paris Westbrook: Uh huh.

Annie Williams: You know, It was nice.

Paris Westbrook: Okay. When you first came to Memphis, where did you move?

Annie Williams: I lived on Crumb, here, I live on Crumb Boulevard.

Paris Westbrook: Oh, okay and what was that community like?

Annie Williams: It was nice.

[0:10:00]

Paris Westbrook: Nice?

Annie Williams: Uh huh. It was nice. Uh huh.

Paris Westbrook: Okay.

Annie Williams: Stayed with my auntie, you know, and went to school, went to Henderson Business College.

Paris Westbrook: Okay.

Annie Williams: And I been here ever since and I say it was experience because we would walk – I said these kids don't have to do any- and we walked five miles to school, five miles back, get home, get the coal and wood in and I only had one brother and he was a baby.

Paris Westbrook: Uh huh.

Annie Williams: So it was an experience. It isn't too much that has to be done like workin' that I don't know how to do, you know, we thought mother, we gonna work us – she said, "Nobody never died from workin'."

Paris Westbrook: Uh huh.

Annie Williams: And me and – after I got to college, so many people like teachers and everything were, "Miss Williams how you do this? How you do that?" and I could tell 'em. But you know at that time I felt like it was hard.

Paris Westbrook: Uh huh.

Annie Williams: Uh huh but it was an experience.

Paris Westbrook: Okay.

Annie Williams: Then after I got – me and my husband raised foster children with our childrens.

Paris Westbrook: Uh huh.

Annie Williams: Uh huh. So he bought this place up in Big – well you heard of Big Buck's Resort?

Paris Westbrook: Yes ma'am.

Annie Williams: On the weekend

[0:11:00]

we would take 'em there, you know, so they can have stuff to do. No, it was good and I was blessed with a good husband; two good husbands.

Paris Westbrook: Uh huh.

Annie Williams: Uh huh. So we're mama and paw paw and he was paw paw everywhere, everybody. And he didn't know how to say no. If somebody needs somethin', he was gonna give it to – and he says, "Baby," he said, "I can get, I can get it back." You know and he would just, everybody just loved him that surrounded him 'cause he didn't know how to say no.

Paris Westbrook: Uh huh.

Annie Williams: Uh huh. And he was blessed. We was blessed.

Paris Westbrook: Okay.

Annie Williams: And so we raised foster children, too.

Paris Westbrook: Okay. During the '50s, '60s, '70s, during like the civil rights period, do you remember anything significant about that that happened in your life or in your community or that really affected you?

Annie Williams: Not really. You know, I wasn't affected

[0:12:00]

by any of it, really. You know, I was around it and I knew about it 'cause I used to sing all the time.

Paris Westbrook: Uh huh.

Annie Williams: Uh huh, my daddy played the piano and we would just – I just had to learn how to do everything and then after we got married we

raised foster children beside our own kids. We was always surrounded by children, you know, and if anybody come around that needed somethin', I would say, "Sidney, you," he said, "Baby, I get it back." You know and if you needed somethin', he was gonna give it to you.

Paris Westbrook: Uh huh.

Annie Williams: Uh huh. So we still got the place up there at Big Buck. He has passed but you know, it was nice.

Paris Westbrook: Okay.

Annie Williams: Uh huh.

Paris Westbrook: What would you say was like the biggest thing that shaped your life?

Annie Williams: The biggest what?

Paris Westbrook: The biggest event or, you know, something grand that happened to you that really shaped your life and who you are.

Annie Williams: Well, I enjoyed like working with the – working with children.

[0:13:00]

Paris Westbrook: Uh huh.

Annie Williams: Uh huh. And we would do – on weekends – we would like plan things for the kids to do, you know, and if they needed anything. If it took our last penny, they need it, he said, "We'll get it back, baby."

Paris Westbrook: Uh huh.

Annie Williams: You know and it is so – it ran life, you know, we didn't ever have to like, you know, so you know, I would fuss at him sometimes, he say, "Everything'll be all right." And it would be.

Paris Westbrook: Uh huh.

Annie Williams: And honey, now on my birthday, kids come from everywhere. It was just nice.

Paris Westbrook: Okay.

Annie Williams: We bought this place in the – on Sidney Street down in Douglas.

Paris Westbrook: Uh huh.

Annie Williams: We had a house out there.

Paris Westbrook: Okay.

Annie Williams: Then we got this big – this resort that way we would have place for the kids to go, you know, on weekends we would take 'em there. It was really nice.

Paris Westbrook: Do you still live in that house on Douglas?

Annie Williams: No, uh uh.

Paris Westbrook: No? Where do you live now?

Annie Williams: I live in Hollywood

[0:14:00]

Paris Westbrook: Oh, okay.

Annie Williams: On uh huh. Yeah, I live in Hollywood on Lynchburg.

Paris Westbrook: Okay. Do you like the community you're in now?

Annie Williams: Uh huh. I like it. It's nice.

Paris Westbrook: Okay.

Annie Williams: It's nice, you know, I'm a person like this I thought I'd see somebody that needs somethin' and feel I gotta help if it took my last penny, you know – you know where you came from but you don't know where you're going.

Paris Westbrook: Uh huh.

Annie Williams: You know and it would always run so I would always get it back. So we thought, I thought my mother and daddy was workin' us real hard but one thing I know – if anything that has to do like chop cotton, pick cotton, workin' in the field, you know, we would walk five miles to school, five miles back.

Paris Westbrook: Uh huh.

Annie Williams: And after I graduated from high school I came here and went to college – Henderson Business College – and I've been in Memphis ever since.

Paris Westbrook: Did you like college?

Annie Williams: Uh huh. Then after we got married we raised foster children.

Paris Westbrook: Uh huh.

Annie Williams: Beside our kids.

[0:15:00]

So it was just nice.

Paris Westbrook: Okay.

Annie Williams: And we still done have, on Sidney Street, we said we'll have a house up on Sidney Street and then this, you know.

Paris Westbrook: Okay.

Annie Williams: Uh huh. So it was nice.

Paris Westbrook: Okay.

Annie Williams: My husband just loved being around children. He was always plannin' somethin' for them to do and everywhere, children and grown people call him paw paw even though he didn't know how to say no.

Paris Westbrook: Uh huh.

Annie Williams: If you needed somethin' – if he had it, you was gonna get it.

Paris Westbrook: Uh huh.

Annie Williams: Uh huh.

Paris Westbrook: Okay.

Annie Williams: Yeah, so no we was blessed.

Paris Westbrook: Okay. Well is there anything else you would like to say to us?

Annie Williams: Well –

Paris Westbrook: Anything significant?

Annie Williams: - you know I just thank God, I really, you know, that I came up like that then my parents, the way they taught us. We was always taught, you know, if you see somebody in need, give it to 'em.

[0:16:00]

You know and we thought we would get 'round where she said, "I hear you talkin'." But one thing about it, you know, after you do it, when you know anything, things would come to you you wouldn't even know where it come from. So I was just blessed, you know, with two good husbands. My first husband died and I met this other guy. We got married. We raised children – we was always surrounded by children.

Paris Westbrook: Uh huh.

Annie Williams: Uh huh. Yeah.

Paris Westbrook: Okay.

Annie Williams: So it was really nice.

Paris Westbrook: Okay. Well Ms. Williams, thank you for talking to us –

Annie Williams: Yeah, I –

Paris Westbrook: - the amount that you did.

Annie Williams: - nice talkin' to you all.

Paris Westbrook: All right.

Annie Williams: Is it what to [Dropout] along the way.

Paris Westbrook: Uh huh.

Annie Williams: Uh huh.

Paris Westbrook: Well thank you for helpin' us, Mrs. Williams.

Annie Williams: Okay.

Paris Westbrook: We surely appreciate it. Here, lemme help you with your micro-

[End of Audio]