

# Rhodes College Digital Archives - DLynx

Phil Glisson, 2013

Item Type	Moving Image
Publisher	Rhodes College
Download date	2026-06-12 05:27:24
Link to Item	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10267/33367">http://hdl.handle.net/10267/33367</a>

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*Hibbert:* Hello. My name is Caroline Hibbert.

*Looney:* And my name is Brittany **Looney**.

*Hibbert:* And on behalf of Crossroads to Freedom and the Center for Transforming Communities, we'd like to thank you for sharing your story with us today.

*Glisson:* You're welcome.

*Looney:* Could you please state your name?

*Glisson:* I'm Phil Glisson.

*Looney:* And when and where were you born?

*Glisson:* I was born in Jackson, Tennessee in 1952, though my parents lived in Huntington, Tennessee at the time.

*Looney:* When did you move to Memphis?

*Glisson:* We moved here in the spring of 1956.

*Hibbert:* And did you move right to the Highland Heights community?

*Glisson:* Hm-hmm. Sort of the Burclare, Highland Heights, Graham Wood community. Whatever you call it.

*Hibbert:* And what school did you attend?

*Glisson:* I went to elementary school at Graham Wood and then of course, what they called Junior High back then and high school at Treadwell.

*Hibbert:* Okay. And what year did you graduate?

*Glisson:* 1970.

*Hibbert:* What was your home life like growing up? Parents' occupation, brother, sisters?

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*Glisson:* Well, my father was the pastor of Leawood Baptist Church. In fact, he was there almost 36 years when he came in 1956. I was four years old and so I did not have the opportunity to move around a lot like a lot of preachers kids 'cause pastors do change Churches much more frequently most of the time and every – 36 years. And so I was living in a stable home and in the same house and all of that all these years and so it was a wonderful experience growing up in the area and being a part of that Church.

*Looney:* Was the Church already established at the time?

*Glisson:* Yes, it was. When he came there, the Church was 10 years old so it was a fairly new Church. A lot of Churches in this area – really, a lot of Churches all over America – started after World War II 'cause all the GIs came home from the war and they were interested in establishing families and of course, having Churches and all of that. People were much more interested in that kind of thing back then than they are today and so that's why you see lots of Churches in the cities.

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They were mostly started back in that time.

*Hibbert:*

How big would you say the congregation was back then?

*Glisson:* At that time, we ran over 1300 in Sunday school, which is the Sunday Morning Bible class and more than that when you talked about the worship services. So, it was a large Church and had a lot of young people that came to it, especially in the '70s. It seemed like in that period of time, it attracted a lot of teenagers – a lot from Treadwell and Kingsbury and other schools. In fact, there was a youth choir in the Church at that time that had 200 teenagers enrolled in it. That's a pretty good size youth choir.

*Hibbert:* Yes, definitely.

*Looney:* How was the Church involved with the community at the time?

*Glisson:* Well, the Church was very involved. The Church sent out buses into the area on Sundays to pick kids up and of course, trying to develop their spiritual welfare. And of course, as we saw needs in the homes where the kids would come from, we would meet their needs. We had a group of internationals move in from –

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the Laos area after the Vietnam war and the Church took them in and ministered to them so the Church back then was very active in ministering to people's needs primarily through the first contact of them coming to the Church and then seeing what needs there were and then going from there.

*Hibbert:* So, how would you compare it to the Churches involvement in the community now?

*Glisson:* Well, Churches now are more – back then, we were just running out of our ears with people and it was almost more than we could keep up with. Now, Churches don't seem to be that large in this community so there are more out there involved with things with people that have not necessarily come to the Church first. You see my point? And so back then, the Church went out and got a lot of people to come through that bus ministry, mainly children and teenagers.

*Looney:* Do you think that added to the fact that the youth congregation was as large as it was?

*Glisson:* That was part of it, yes. But it just sort of then caught on.

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It just took a life on of its own. And of course, there was a great spiritual movement in America back then called the Jesus Movement, all over America, and it was just this Church here capitalized on it real – in a great way. In other words, we just sort of fanned the flames and built on the spirit that was here in America. There were youth revivals and evangelists coming into town at the coliseum and different places and young people's events and concerts and movies – Christian movies. It was just a lot of things going on that upheld the young people and attracted young people.

You see what I'm saying? Through that, we had in roads into the families and then discovered different needs and so forth and were able to meet those needs.

*Looney:* What were sort of the demographics of the Church at the time?

*Glisson:* Young.

Looney: Young?

Glisson: Yes. Very young. A lot of – like I said, a lot of teenagers. A lot of young adults. I guess back then the bulk of the Church was from age 20 to age 40. That was the majority of the people then in that Church

Looney: Was it sort of like –

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mixed as far as diversity?

Glisson: Yes. Through the bus ministry, diversity came to the Church. In fact, Leawood was one of the first Churches in the whole city to integrate and it was primarily through the bus ministry. As the buses went out into the neighborhoods, the policy established by my father, the pastor, was “No kid is gonna be left behind. If he wants to get on the bus, he's gonna get on the bus.”

So, you know how the kids ride – they bring their friends. And so black, white, Indian, Asian – it didn't matter. They all came. In fact, the group from Asia had come over and they were all welcomed into and integrated into the Church – what were called the Mong people. In fact, back in the early 1970s, our Church took a lot of heat for integration and one of our buses was burned by the White Citizens' Council.

But those are long gone days and so I don't even think that council exists anymore. Nevertheless, when the Lord is at work –

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hey, the Bible says that God's love is for everybody and the Church is for everybody and so it didn't bother the Church. The Church went on and it grew and like I say, it was some great days. And a lot of lives were touched.

Hibbert: So, around what time was it integrated?

Glisson: Early 1970s. '71, something like that.

Hibbert: And that was before most Churches in the city were?

Glisson: Oh, yes.

*Looney:* Did the youth in the Church ever – are you familiar with Kneel Ins?

*Glisson:* Who?

*Looney:* Kneel Ins.

*Glisson:* Kneel Ins?

*Looney:* Well, it was an equivalent to sit ins during the time.

*Glisson:* Oh, no, no. There was none of that going on around here. It was just – it was just normal. It was not – people come into the Church no matter who they were, what they looked like. Back then, it was not just the color.

It was hippies coming there from Overton Square and Highland Strip. It was guys with long hair down to their feet –

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unkempt and not dressed properly. The Church just had an open door policy – man, you were welcomed there. You're gonna get loved. You're gonna find out the gospel and so they just flocked in, all shapes and sizes, colors, smells, looks, you name it. We had a bunch of hippies come in from Highland Strip one night with their robes and their beads and their sandals and they just sat down on the floor right in from of the pulpit.

Of course, by the time they go there, there were no seats left. In those days, you didn't get a seat if you didn't get there a little early. But I'd give anything for those days again. But anyway, it was that – the Church had the reputation. No matter who you are, you're welcome there.

*Looney:* Was it one of the most – would you consider it the most flourishing Church in the community at the time?

*Glisson:* One of them. Certainly, Belleview was larger at that time. But it would be way up there at the top, yes. I would say it was in top five in the whole city. Probably in this neighborhood, yes, it was the number one flourishing Church. In this Graham Wood –

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Highland Heights, Kingsbury, Treadwell, Burclare area – yes. Oh, by far it was the most flourishing Church. No question about it. But back then, as I said, they were coming in from all over the city to that Church, as well as this neighborhood.

*Hibbert:* So, about your time at Treadwell – you said you graduated in 1970. What year did Treadwell integrate?

*Glisson:* It was about that time – late '60s. Not many. It was a few that had come in because they lived in the neighborhood.

*Hibbert:* So did that at all affect your learning experience or any of your classmates?

*Glisson:* No, nobody even thought anything about it. It was just –

*Hibbert:* It wasn't controversial.

*Glisson:* Oh, no. The controversy came with the forced busing. And I was out of high school by then. That's what brought the controversy. In fact, I saw a program on channel 10 about the forced busing and about the effect it had on Melrose. The people in the Melrose community were sent in three or four different directions on the buses.

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It busted up that cohesiveness in that neighborhood and the people there didn't like it. Integration was happening normally and naturally at that time but the busing just sort of pushed it and forced it. It would have continued to happen. I don't think it would have had all the private schools spring up as it did in the early '70s had it just be allowed to run its course but nevertheless, those days are gone. You can't go back and change them.

But there was absolutely no – I don't remember anything out of the ordinary in the school year when blacks started coming to the school. It was just normal. There was just nothing to it. You know what I'm saying? It was no big deal.

Nobody complained. Nobody said anything. It was just the way it was.

*Looney:* About how many students – African American students – came into Treadwell at the time?

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*Glisson:* At that time they were starting integrated, it was just a few.

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Yeah, just a few, see? But more and more though, each year, was coming in. You see what I'm saying? It was 'cause it was a neighborhood school. You had the geographical boundaries.

You had to live geographically within that boundary to attend that school. So, it was the fact that –

*Looney:* So, those students lived in that neighborhood and knew people there so it was all –

*Glisson:* Right. Back in those days, you didn't cross boundary lines to go to school. You went to the school in your neighborhood. It was a neighborhood school. You see my point?

And so that's the reason for the limited number when it first started. There wasn't that many that lived in the neighborhood.

*Looney:* Do you know where these students came from or what –

*Glisson:* Where they moved from? Oh, no, I have no idea.

*Looney:* What school – yeah. All right.

*Glisson:* I just know they lived in the neighborhood.

*Looney:* And how did religion play a part in your life? Just growing up, how was your home life like because it was so, I guess, religious based?

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*Glisson:* Yes. Well, certainly, it affected my worldview that the gospel is for everybody, regardless of who they are, what their color is or anything. It affected my lifestyle. I did not indulge in the activities that bring harm and so forth to a person, whether it's alcohol or drugs or immorality or whatever. As a Christian, that's not the way I want to live and the Lord convicted me about that.

And when I gave my life to Christ and believed the gospel, then I got a motivation within me not to do that anymore. In fact, I remember going back to the store and having the same temptation come up and I said, "Oh, no. I'm not gonna give in to this

temptation. This is not the way I've chosen to live anymore.” And so you see my point? And so therefore, instead of me now sitting in a jail somewhere or whatever or running from the law all the time, I'm seeking to be a productive citizen who contributes to society rather than one who's always taking from it. And that's the effect the gospel's –

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had on me and actually, you can multiply that many thousand fold through not just the ministry of our Church, but all these Churches throughout this area.

*Hibbert:* So, what's some, I guess, advice you would give to young people in the neighborhood now or current Treadwell students?

*Glisson:* I would advise them to go to Church somewhere, get involved. Get involved with the youth program at the Church. Get to know kids there. I would invite them and encourage them to give their lives to Christ and believe the gospel and Christian faith and live by it. And I would advise them that you're never a winner when you go against the law, when you run with the wrong crowd and do the wrong things.

It's gonna cost you more than it pays. It's gonna mess your life up. It's gonna wreck your life. It's gonna ruin your life and the older you get, the more you're gonna see that. But unfortunately, a lot of times by the time people realize the mistakes they've made, most of their lives have been wasted or much of it has.

So, you only go around once. You only live once. So make the most of it. Follow Christ. Be a productive citizen.

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Do right and in the end, you're gonna like it better and you're gonna be pleasing more to yourself and those who know you and to God.

*Looney:* Is there anything else about I guess Treadwell and your work in the community that you would like to share with us before we wrap up?

*Glisson:* Well, I know Treadwell's no longer a high school and so I know the kids over there – many of them come from broken homes. Many of them come from difficult homes. And my heart bleeds

for them. I think God for all the opportunities that are available to them now through the various ministries in the area and the outreach programs that are going on to try to help them. And so I just hope that continues. I hope the kids will take advantage of these things, no matter what they are, and hope that they can realize that they can break out of these cycles that they find themselves in with their families and that they can, like I say, become more of the person God created them to be. Like I say, my experience at Treadwell was a good one but I had a particular teacher I enjoyed the most –

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Faye **Lennom**. She was a World History teacher. She really had a strong impact on my life. She's dead now. But I just – my advice to anybody is – at Treadwell or anywhere – don't give up. You can change. You can go a different direction and I encourage you to do that.

*Hibbert:* Just wondering – we were talking about Principal Maybry earlier. Was he still there when you were in high school?

*Glisson:* I just can't remember. I wished I could. But I'm wracking my brain and I just can't remember. I'm sorry.

*Hibbert:* It's okay. He just seemed to be a very like, influential and there were a lot of the kids who went there during his 30 years.

*Glisson:* Well, being one who tried to stay out of trouble and I did, I didn't have the opportunity to see the principal a whole lot. Like I said, the main thing I remember about Treadwell is Faye Lennom and ROTC – Army ROTC. That's the main things I remember about Treadwell.

*Looney:* Thank you for sharing your story with us today. We really do –

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Appreciate it. So, thanks.

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