

Marie Thompson – 20 janvier 2020. January

Can you tell me about where you are from?

I was born in Arkansas, a real rural community, actually a country-town, very small population, probably 100, maybe 200 people but it was all spread out, rural land. My father was a farmer and I don't know how many acres of land he had, it was quite a bit, I don't want to put a number on it, I know it was like 250 or something at that time. But he, married my mother, he was 15-16 older than my mom. He had a wife before my mother who died after giving birth to their fifth child and so when he married my mother, he already had 5 children. Now the 5th child was a baby and he had her sister who – she and her husband had no children – so to help them out, she took the baby because he had no wife and he had four other little ones. Later, he married my mother and they never got that child back although she grew up knowing that my dad was her father but my uncle and aunt raised her as their child so to speak and she would come visit us and we raised — you know we were siblings so she knew that but she was raised like an only child so she was quite different. Because she didn't have to share anything, it was all about her. And they doted on her, they kind of worshiped her, she was real pretty, long pretty hair and everything. And, so, when my mother and father married, they started another family, which my mother had fourteen children, she gave birth to fourteen. Of the fourteen, one died, so that's how we got to be eighteen. Now, later years, I'm told that within that first set, there was a miscarriage and with my mother, I know that one of those died, I think she lived to be a few hours old. So there were 18 living siblings, 9 brothers and 9 sisters. And so my brothers as they got older and became adults, they, I think at least 3 of them, went into the military and when they came back, they married, they no longer wanted to have to do with the farm life. You know farming is difficult, it's hard, especially back in those days because we had no machines so to speak to plow and all that. So, as they left home and started their own families, they moved from Moro, Arkansas to what's called – another small Arkansas town, which is where I grew up. And later my brothers migrated to Flint, Michigan and that was during the great GM era when they were building cars. None of my brothers had much of a formal education, my father was not a man who believed in education much, my mother did. So, one by one, the brothers migrated because one was doing okay, so he comes back and gets another brother so eventually all of the boys were living in Flint, except one. So, that's my beginning. Now, my dad sold the farm and we moved to Pine Bluff, Arkansas, and I lived there for I guess, I was about 5 when he sold the farm, and I had two younger sisters, younger than me, but everybody else was gone. I had an older sister that was special, she was mentally challenged, and so she was older than me but she had the mind of an 8 or 9-year-old. So when I was 11, we moved to Helena, Arkansas, we're still in Arkansas. So I grew up in Helena, Arkansas, which is a very small town, at that time, probably 15-20,000. So I went to high school there, I got married, had my first child, graduated high school, and got married right out of high school, started having babies but my dream was to go to nursing school but I got pregnant so I had to put that dream aside. And then, so, I was – this is when my life became difficult. As long as I was – when we were in the country, my dad, they had everything, my mom she would can, put away all the vegetables, we had all the orchards with all fruits you can name in the orchards. So we were poor but we didn't know we were poor. (interruption par quelqu'un qui sonne à la porte) So where was I? My dad, when we moved to Elaine, I graduated, and I got married and got babies right after the other, so we had six children, my husband and I. But I never gave up my dream of going to nursing school. I went to work, doing jobs and then my husband separated and I moved to Michigan where my family was. As a matter of fact, I was pregnant and my

youngest daughter was born there. But then, my husband and I got back together so we went back to Helena and I started a job, things were good and then I still had in the back of my mind that I wanted to go to nursing school so I did, I started nursing school, my baby was three years old but I lived across the street from my mom and she told me if I wanted to go to nursing school, she would help me with the kids. So I finished the school in 68 and went to work at the local hospital. Then I worked for 8 or 9 years as an LPN (Licensed Practical Nurse) and then I went back to junior college and got an associate degree in nursing, which was difficult with all those kids because my husband did not want me to go to school. But I did anyway. So, to moving on, I won't go through the hardships that I went through with all of that but things got bad in my marriage and so I stayed in for 25 years and my youngest daughter was in her first year of college when I got a divorce and as a matter of fact, I had 4 kids in college at one time. My oldest son had left town and he had joined the navy and then he did three years in the navy, and then came back, but could not find what he wanted to do so he joined the Merchant Marines and that's what he is doing, that he's done for 30 years and he lives in Nevada. So after getting a divorce, I decided with some other nurses that I would go back and get my bachelors in nursing. After completing the bachelor, that's when I decided – in the process of that, they made me a head nurse of general surgery, I was in charge of that floor with about 46 employees under me and I did that for 10 years but our hospital was small, like 155 beds and that was the time when healthcare was starting to go through a lot of demise so to speak and so my hospital had laid off, had three layoffs and I guess I could see the handwriting on the walls, and so I loved nursing but I was unhappy. And so I had a girlfriend who lived here, who had been begging me to come here in Atlanta to visit her so, I graduated from Memphis State in May of 1986 and then she called me before Thanksgiving – I had told her I was coming to visit her but I hadn't made any plans – so she calls and she says "Are you really coming to visit me?" I said "Yes". She's like "Well, I'm gonna get a ride down home, I'm gonna ride down with my cousin, and then you can ride back, I can drive back with you, and you can spend the week" and that's we agreed upon. And I talked to another friend for her to come with me so I wouldn't have to come back myself. So that was November 1986, and this is literally, I know it sounds crazy but it's true, as I was riding in on I-20, before I even got to downtown Atlanta, looking at the skyline, which I think is beautiful, and remember I'm coming from a really small country town where there are no high rises or skyscrapers, the tallest building was about 6 floors, okay? So I just almost immediately fell in love with Atlanta. And I said "Oh, I like this place" and she said "While you're here, why don't you, let's get the papers and see what's available, who needs help in the hospital." I didn't bring a resume, I didn't come looking for a job and that's what we did. She was trying to convince me to come here because we were from the same hometown and so I said "Okay, I'll tell you what, I do three, we pick three hospitals and we see what's what". But she wasn't a nurse, so she named three hospitals, I went to three different hospitals, Emory was the last one and they really didn't offer me the most money but they had programs that I was interested in like they were just starting their transplants programs, they were already transplanting kidneys and all these other things and that sounded interesting to me. So I met with the head nurse, didn't – we just sat and talk like we're doing now and I told her my history and everything and that was around the Thanksgiving weekend and I told her I was gonna move but she couldn't — I didn't know when because I had made no preparations and I didn't bring a resume, I told her "You cannot call the hospital for references because I haven't told anybody but I will as soon as I go back" so that's – within 6 weeks, I wanted a day-position but she didn't have one but she called me and she told me had a full-time night position if I wanted in and I took it on the spot. And I moved here in January of 1987 and I went to work at Emory Hospital February 9th 1987, that was my first day of work. And I worked there for 18 years, they sent me back to school for like I told you yesterday, I went on the nurse exchange program. But

the thing about Atlanta for me was ... Well, first of all, I didn't have any family here. I had this one girlfriend but when I moved, we were on opposite ends of the city. I was in Northeast Atlanta and she was in South, over Cleveland avenue. And she was a real estate appraiser and she was busy all the time and so was I, so we didn't get to see each other that much on the weekend but in the meantime I joined a church and got involved but what I found for me, and a lot of people disagree with this, I think it has to do – what I found was a community of people who were very friendly because the people in my church were warm, friendly people and that's what made my join my church because it reminded me of the church that I left at home. And for me, God is the center of my life so my church and the people that I am involved with is center for me because I've been through different tragedies. I lost all 9 of my brother, I lost my mother, my father and all of my sisters, I told you we were 18, it's only 3 of us living now. So throughout these tragedies, and then losing my son, the core of friends that I had is what sustained me but I've heard other people say that Atlanta is not warm, that it's hard to get to know people in the black community and I think it's true because sometimes we are not as welcoming. I think it depends largely on what groups you're trying to get into. Well, I came from the poor group so I wasn't looking for anything specific. What I was looking for was family. And that's what we found in BNN, like I said, when I started looking in the paper, the Creative Loafing and that's how I found – Well, in the AJC, there were groups and I called a couple of them but these were mostly white groups. I asked them "Do you have any black members?" and they said "No." Now, I've worked with white people all my life but i wanted that, I wanted that family feeling that I knew I was gonna get. So, when I saw the Black Atlanta Transplants, I went to a couple of meetings and we joined, some of us joined and then when things started going (?), that's when we stepped out of it. I wasn't actually at that meeting when they just walked out, I was told, because they just didn't like the way Lea was taken the group but in the midst of that, we all had formed this bond and we were sad that we were no longer part of that group, so what were we gonna do? So then, Denis and Wesley "Why can't we form our own?". So that's how BNN came about. It was a core group of us, 10 or 20 of us, I don't remember, that started BNN. Because Lea didn't want to elect officers, she wanted to appoint people. Well, we didn't do that. We elected officers, presidents, vice-president, we had a body. And it started from that. And then, we did things as a family, we would meet once a month and then we would have subgroups, like East Side, West Side, because Atlanta is so big! We broke up into four groups: East Side, West Side, North Side, and South Side. And within their little group, they would plan functions for their specific group but they had to talk to their head, to the body first so that we wouldn't have things going on at the same time. Like if you were in East side, you could be planning an event and we were planning an event because you could go to each group's function. And so, we did that for a number of years but it kind of failed apart but we still kept going, we paid our dues, and we did a lot of stuff. We did a lot of community-activity type things but the bottom line was the family, the connection, being together and supporting each other. And, like I said, when I moved into this house, these guys moved me in this house and there were guys who liked to do yard work like Arthur. And we would cling on each other and depend on each other and like Wesley was saying, the young lady that got killed by her daughter, we had some tragedies within the group, that, if we had not pulled together, I think would have destroyed us. We would have functions where we would, once a month or once every other month, we would go to church together, we would worship together. Now, not everybody in this group was Christian, we didn't discriminate, they came from the islands, they were Muslims, you know, whatever you believed in, that was not what we were about, okay? We were not "Okay, you're not a Baptist, you're not a Christian, you're a catholic, you can't join this group." That was not what we were about: we were about being a family to each other. And I think we did a really good job of that because we had a lot of people that came from the

different islands, from Africa, from Jamaica and everywhere and we just took people in and we sheltered them. This house has probably been a blessing to me as well as to a lot of other people. I can't even tell you the number of people that I've housed in this house, some family and some not. The function, each one of us would open up our homes for different functions to house, we would do a black history movie night during Black History Month, we would always do a movie night and usually it was here, but we've had it at other places. We would bring some black movies, potluck, food and we would sit around and play movies and then we would discuss them. And I don't know if there are any specific questions you want to ask me?

I have so many questions about what you said!

Go ahead!

I guess the first one is that you grew up in Arkansas during Jim Crow?

Yes, you know, it was Jim Crow but we were on the farm, in the beginning, like I said, I was about 5 or 6 years old when we moved. So I grew up with the white and colored toilets and the white and colored bathrooms. And that wasn't going on when I moved here but I grew up where when you went to the drugstore to get your prescription, you had to stand over here to the counter and wait for them to give it to you and we couldn't even buy anything out of the drugstore or if you went to a restaurant that was not run by black people, then you had to go through the back door. I lived that life! And in spite of that, you know, we survived, I didn't think too much about it because that was the norm for us. Now I didn't get into – my school was segregated. I graduated in 1958 so all the schools were segregated. I tell you Nicolas, the books that we had – okay, first of all, we had to buy our books in high school, and elementary school, they provided the books. The books that we had were books that were handed down to us from the white schools. This is true, okay? They had used those books years before, none of them were new, they were handed down to us. We accepted that. Then, when I got into high school, I was in a segregated school so we had to purchase our books, we had to buy our high school book, every book, some were new, some were used but they were the books that were handed down to us from the white high schools. But that was the way it was. And so when I graduated, I graduated from a segregated high school. Now, I graduated number three in my class. And there were boys who played on the basket ball team and on the football team that won full scholarship but they won scholarships to black colleges, okay? So it was only in later years that our boys began winning scholarship to the white schools, to the prominent schools but yet, some of those boys, they were so good, even though they went to a HBCU school, some of them made in into the pro, they were that good! They went into Grambling, which is a HBCU school and there was a whole bunch of those young men that played professional football. So our theory was that all we needed was a chance, all we needed was an opportunity. So if you take that opportunity from us, you know? And that's why people get angry and they get disillusioned because they feel like they can't fight the fight, there's too much resistance, and there is, there really is. So, we didn't have the violence in the school that we had now either. We had the fights, and little gangs and that kind of things, but it wasn't like it is now, knives and stuff coming to schools, and guns and stuff like that. That was not... So yeah, I did grew up with Jim Crow. Now, I didn't see any crosses burning on my yard but I worked, when I was 12 years old, I was cleaning houses in white women's homes, you know, watching their kids for 2 dollars a day. Yeah, sure was. But back then, 2 dollars a day, for 6 days, you could draw a lot with 12 dollars but... So it was a hard life but it was our life and we

lived it and we flourished within it because our mindsets was "I'm just gonna get to the next level, just give me a chance," you know? So what's the next question?

You told me about moving to Michigan, can you tell me about this experience?

Okay, I moved to Michigan in 1962 and the reasons why I moved to Michigan was because my marriage was on the rocks, we had 5 kids. My husband at the time, he had become an alcoholic and a gambler. One of them is bad, two of them is awful and so he has started to becoming abusive so my brothers wanted to help me come out of that situation and so they helped me to move away from it and so I moved to Michigan and I was happy to move and I was pregnant when I moved with my sixth child. But after being up there, my husband came up and he got a job and he worked up there for a little while and we made up and we got back together and things were great for a while. And so my youngest child was born in Michigan. Well, we stayed up there for about 10 months and he decided he didn't like it up there so he came back to Helena and got his old job back and so he moved us back. So, when we came back, we know have 6 children so we have to start all over again and that was kinda hard but we had the help from my mom and from my family and everything. So we got a house, I went to work at the hospital but I was working in a dietary department and so I quit that and got another job and then I was encouraged to go to nursing school so I did. But while I was in Michigan, it was just so cold, we was up there during the winter months. I might have liked it better if I had been there during the summer but we were there doing December, January, February and March and all the way up to July, even July was still cold. So I was glad to leave, really. Then, my brothers were so, they were, in some ways, controlling my life, and I, at the time, I loved my husband and I just wanted to get back together because I came from a broken home, my parents separated, so I didn't want that for my children. So we gave it another try and we did. I know that they meant to help me but they wanted to control what I said, did, where I lived and all that kind of things and I just couldn't take it. So we moved back. But the big thing, the two things that were instrumental in me wanting to leave was the weather and my family just wanting to dictate to me every step of my life and they wanted – and James was a very independent person, it made a lot of animosity between him and me so I chose to go with my husband, and we came back and we made a life, a good life for a while. But the thing with alcoholic, you know, they – that's just what they are: alcoholic. He was a person that didn't drink at all in the navy for years, never drink. He starts to go out with these guys after work, go to bars, and sipping it, liking it and over years became an alcoholic and then, you became abusive so that's what made me get out of it. But as far as moving from Michigan, those are the two things: the cold and the influence from my family.

How was it to move from Arkansas that was still under Jim Crow to Michigan, that I assume was different?

Well, it was different. It was in the 1960s, 62-63. And so it wasn't as prominent as it was in Arkansas because, I'm trying to remember Nicolas, I don't remember in 63 in Michigan, whether we still had the colored and white toilets but I know we still did in Arkansas. There was more privileges up there at the time. Yet, there were prejudices and the Ku Klux Klan and all of those organizations didn't show themselves. I won't say they weren't there. They were there! They just didn't show themselves as much as they did back in Arkansas.

And so, moving to Atlanta, how did you choose which neighborhood you were going to move to?

Well, when I came to Atlanta, I came to a job and I had been here in about – and Atlanta wasn't as big as it is now, it has grown over these past 30 years. So my thing was: first, I had the job so I lived with my girlfriend, she had told me when I went back from the vacation "If you wanna come back and work and find your job, you can live with me until you decide where you want to live." That was before I got a job offer and when I went back, I'm thinking "I'm gonna move" because I was – things were happening in a not good way in my hospital and I guess I could see the handwriting on the wall, not really knowing. But when I got the job at Emory and came, I stayed with her for 6 weeks and so I had to decide where I wanted to live, but I knew I wanted to be close to my job so that determined where I would live. So I looked in the newspapers and found this place called "Apartment finders" so I called them and I went to their office and I told them what I wanted: I wanted a 2-bedroom apartment, I told them the amount that I wanted to pay, which was a heck of a lot more than in my house in northern Arkansas and I wanted to be close to Emory. So he showed me three different areas, they were all close to Emory and I chose the one that had the nicest spot, it was 10 or 11 miles from Emory. And I didn't move here until four years later but I was living near Buford Highway, real nice area at the time. That's what made me move there, because of the close proximity to my job so when I started looking for a house, I sold my house in Arkansas. In the meantime in 1990, my son gets killed, and that was another era of my life that kind of went off for a while but when I got a real estate agent, I told him I wanted to be close to my job. And I wanted to stay in DeKalb county, okay? Now I had a girlfriend and her husband that had moved into this neighborhood and he probably got sick of me because we looked at so many houses. And my thing was "I don't want to find a house and living in for two or three months and find out that I hated it." So he said to me one day "What area do you like?" and I said "I like it over where my friends live but I know I can't afford a house over there." He said "I don't know, let's look." So he found this house and I liked it but I still wanted to look some more and nothing was hitting me so I said to him one day "I wanna go back and see the house from Governing Drive" and he said "Somebody put a contract on it now but the contract didn't go through, let me see." So he brought me back over here, we put an offer on it and that's how I got this house. But it was 11 miles one way and 12 miles the other way. So that was the two things: the price, the area that sold me on this house.

And you said you wanted to stay in DeKalb County? Why?

Well, at the time, I was told that the taxes were lower and that DeKalb county was growing and I had a lot of friends that lived in DeKalb county. So that was what I heard about DeKalb county, I didn't really know but I never regretted living in DeKalb county, I never wanted to move out, I've been happy here.

And I was wondering what did Stone Mountain and your neighborhood look like when you moved here?

Well, my neighborhood, this subdivision has, it probably has more now, but it had, I was told, about 1,700 homes so it was one of the largest subdivisions. This subdivision was predominantly white. As a matter of fact, when I moved here, my neighbors on this side were white, and my neighbors right there were white, and the ones down the next house were white. That's no longer true. All my neighbors in this surrounding area are black. Now, they – I don't know if you heard the term "white flight"?

I did, yeah.

Okay, well that's what usually happens when we start moving in. It's a true fact, it's not something that people make up. The white population moved out, largely, they're moving back in because the thing about most of the house in this subdivision is that they are soundly built. And you have beautiful homes here. And they're old homes like this house is over 30 years old. So I don't know what the ratio is now in terms of Black/white, there's Mexican, there's Indian, there's all races in this subdivision but what the ratio is, the percentage I couldn't tell you.

And did you feel comfortable moving here knowing that they were white people around that might not be welcoming?

Oh, that was not a threat to me because even though I grew up in the South, I was raised and educated in the South, my world has always been among white people. And I've always had to work with them, and I've worked *for* them as a child, cleaning their houses and cleaning their toilets and stuff. But as I worked in the hospital, I was working among them and with them. So when I became a nurse, it was even more prevalent. But in my hospital, there were no black RN so to speak but as they put the schooling, we started going to school so we were hired. In my hospital, I was the first black head nurse, the first black supervisor. So I've been to so many meetings, even after coming to Emory, where I was the only one in that meeting. So no, I wasn't threatened in being in an area where it was mostly white. Because when I moved, my next-door neighbor came over, they welcome me, they brought a welcome-home package and so that made me feel very comfortable and the people across the street, they did. The people across the street were older and the reason they moved up into the mountains was retirement. But around the corner, Golfing Crossing, all that area was white people. As a matter of fact, one of the sales representatives, that used to come to bring us products at the hospital, he lived in one of those houses down there. So I wasn't threatened because they never did anything to intimidate me. I was welcomed in this neighborhood even though people moved out and moved on and other people moved in, they were friendly and neighborly.

Because one of the first things I heard about Stone Mountain when I moved here was that it was the headquarters of the KKK back in the days.

It was, it was!

So was that something that you were aware of when you moved here?

When I getting ready to move here in 1986, one of the girls that I worked with, one of the nurse – she was white – and she said, because they didn't want me to leave, she said "Aren't you afraid?" because that was when, I don't know, you remember when Oprah did her show in Forsyth county and she went down and met with the KKK, it was a whole big upheaval and uprising and she said to me "Aren't you afraid to be going to Stone Mountain? That's where the KKK are". I said "Listen, I could be working right aside the KKK and don't know it. (44:08)" I said "No". I wasn't intimidated by that. But I later did – I didn't know what I should have known about Stone Mountain because I wasn't moving to Stone Mountain at that time, see? I was moving to Atlanta and so I didn't even know how far Stone Mountain was from Atlanta so it didn't bother me. Maybe it should have but I don't think it would have made a difference in me making up my mind to move because I feel like there are some of us, and some of them and some of y'all wherever we go. So I can't – it's the same thing with terrorists. When we live our lives in terror – I could sit up here in this house and I'm not gonna go out

and experience anything and some of the best friends I have are white. As a matter of fact, two of the girls I worked with – one I trained, one I recruited at Emory – we get together four times a year and have lunch and talk about old times and I go to her house and have dinners. I'm a Christian and I believe in God and I know when we get to heaven – and I'm trying to make it – there's not gonna be no separate heaven and separate hell. Those of us that make it, we're gonna be together. So the problem is we can't be together down here. And none of this stuff that we accumulate are gonna be taken with us, it's all gonna be left here for somebody else. So to answer your question if I lived in fear, no. I didn't and I still don't. Like I told you, I'm 80 years old and a lot of people my age aren't still driving and I'm driving on the interstate. A lot of my friends from home told me "You need to quit driving! You shouldn't be out on the interstate at night!" I'm like "I can't live my life like that: there's just too much out there for me to see and do for me to quit right now." I've got too much going on for me right now. So I can't live that life. And for the most part, I'm healthy, so that's a blessing.

You mentioned that you had black history month films and things like that so I was wondering if BNN was involved politically in Atlanta or if you worked with political organizations maybe?

Well, I think we were involved politically but maybe not as a group. There's a whole bunch of us that were individually involved. But we didn't "Support the Democrats or the Republicans or Independents" as a group. We left that up to the individual. And we had some heated discussions about that, about what was going on at that particular time but I don't think – we didn't expound on that so much. Because one thing about political and religious discussion, you can lose people, you can lose friendship, you can make friends or you can lose them so for me, I don't have, I don't really do political discussions. I don't really do racial discussions and I'm not going to get into a conversation with you about the Bible. First of all, I'm not a Bible scholar, I read it but I'm not a scholar and so, those things I tend to just kind of... I will give you my opinion but I'm not going to get into a heated conversation with you. Because one of us is gonna come out angry and it is a no-win for me situation. So we didn't do that. We didn't as a body of people. We had our own issues and our own ideas of who we would support but we didn't say "Okay, BNN is going for this person, BNN is going to vote this person". We left that out to the individuals.

But you were still interested in celebrating black history and black culture?

Yes, Martin Luther King day like today, we went to parades, we had our own little signs and we marched, yeah. Which I'm kinda sad that we lost a lot of that but I have great memories of the things that we did do. But like Angela was saying yesterday, when the younger generation came on, they wanted to take into a different direction and I guess maybe in a sense we were resisting, didn't want to go down their road. I don't mind saying I'm old school and a lot of things I see Nicolas is just in some ways outrageous and I keep my opinion to myself because like I said my children are adult so even though I have my niece here, she lives here with me, she's 25 or 26 but she's an adult and I treat her like an adult. Unless she asks me my opinion on certain things. Because I didn't raise her, her mom and dad raised her and they did a good job. She's very polite and educated and she's on top of it too, politically. Now, we're not getting into a political debate with her because we're like this on a lot of issue. And part of it is because of that era that I grew up in and the things that I've gone through and she has no clue. And most young people don't. And they don't see it from our side. Because they see us as having, like when we had to go to the white and colored toilets, they see that as ... What's the word I wanna use? That we just accepted!

Submission?

But that's the way it was! Yes, submission. That's what it was at that time.

You said that the younger generation is BNN was taking the network into a different direction. Could you be more specific?

Well, we were more involved with social situations and I think that they wanted to go off on... more having fun time things. And we did those too, we had picnics, we did wild water rafting and we did plan trips and all of that. But I think that some of the things that were important to us became less important to them. And, I don't know, you might ask Wesley about it, he might have some different opinions than mine but I just think that probably because of my age group, I kinda fell off the cliff because I didn't want to go down their road.

When you moved to Atlanta, were your children still with you?

No, my children, let's see. When I moved here, I had one married child and she was living in California at the time. Two of my daughters were in Little Rock, which they later moved here and now they're in Florida. I have another son, my oldest son, I told you, was in the Merchant Marines and still is but my youngest son, he moved here about a month or two after I did. He lived with me and lived with me for a number of years. My oldest daughter, she moved here in 89. So I moved away from them but then they (laughter)

Cannot get away from them!

Yeah, then they moved here because they all felt like they had better opportunities here and they did. They got good jobs so they moved here. My oldest daughter works for Verizon and they moved her to Florida.

When you first visited Atlanta, you said you spent a week here, what did you like about it?

Well, I liked the fact that there was so much to do because there is very little to do in my town. We had to go over to Mississippi to go to the movies. There were just so much culture here: the Fox theater and the King center and even Varsity because it was the biggest fast food place in the world. So I loved the fact that I could get involved in whatever I wanted to get involved in. There was always something to do. And someone to do it with.

Do you remember what you heard about Atlanta before actually coming to visit?

What I heard about Atlanta, at the time, when I was coming, it was those, the murders. I came right after that or during that time when all of these murders was going on. So, that bothered me but I felt like I was not going to be involved in that and I didn't feel insecure about moving here because of that. But Maynard Jackson was the mayor when I moved here and I had heard that he was the first black mayor so to me that was positive and I had learned that there were a lot of prominent black people and if you wanted to expand and do well, you could do it here. I had no desire to go in business for myself but I did want to grow in my profession and my goal was to – one of the other reasons I wanted to work at Emory was because of their, they had a great tuition reimbursement program and so I wanted to work for a year and then go back and get my masters in nursing. Well, in the midst of that, my son got killed, and Emory

had already set me that what was called the ET program which I had to go to school to get in that profession and so, when my son got killed, it just threw me for a loop for a while and I was like "I can't study, I'm already doing what I wanna do" and so I didn't pursue that but it was – I couldn't have done if I had gotten to get my mind wrapped around it, but after I came of it, I was never dissatisfied at my job.

And so if you were to compare your hometown and Atlanta, what are the biggest differences that struck you?

I don't know if you would call it the biggest differences but – there are just so many differences, they're almost too numerous to name. There's just no comparison from my hometown to Atlanta. Not at all because first of all, the black people here, they're all about, the majority of them, are about education. That was a thing about going to work at Emory, they were for your education and they supported that. If you want to go down that road, there's somebody to support that. Culturally, there's no comparison: movie theaters and people on the move, different organizations for you to get involved in. There's a lot of bad stuff going on in Atlanta too, a whole bunch of bad stuff: killing, drugs, gangs, all of that. And it's more prevalent now than it was when I moved here. I don't understand this, the young people in the schools, the bullying, the hatred, the hatred for each other and to me, prejudice and hatred is a learned behavior. You don't come out of the womb, hating somebody because of the color of their skin or because of their religion or whatever. That's a learned behavior. So if they're not getting it from home, they're getting it from people they're associating with, it's perpetuated. We didn't have that even though we were segregated, we didn't have this type of bullying in school. I mean, we picked on kids and I was bullied a little bit but not to the degree that it is now. So there's no comparison. There's no comparison. There's so much more to get involved in, that's positive here, than there was where I came from. Which help me to grow, culturally. Because there was no theater for me to go to and stuff like that.

Is there anything you want to add or anything we haven't covered that you think might be relevant?

One thing that we didn't talk about – and I don't know if this relevant for your subject — in the black race, there is color prejudice that we have in our own race against each other. As far as lighter skin blacks, pretty hair, straight hair, nappy hair, that kind of things. And maybe after 400 years, we should have gotten over that. But that dates back from slavery, how the master treated – because almost all of light-skinned women and babies were babies of the slave master. And so some of those light-skinned slaves, they got better treatment, they got to be house slaves, the house niggers as they called them and so that perpetuated that feeling about the color and it's still prevalent today. We have not conquered enough to get over that. So I don't know if some of that is gonna play into your studies, your research but as you talk to more people, some of that may come out.

Is that nothing that you noticed here? In Atlanta or in BNN?

Oh yes, it's everywhere. It plays a part when you go job hunting.

Did you face any discrimination when you looked for a job or a house?

It's funny that you – and I tell people that and they think I'm crazy again: I don't feel like – I got every job that I went after because – and I got this from my mother who had a 3rd grade

education but who taught me that I was as good as anybody and that I could do anything that I set my mind to. So for me, every job that they applied for, I went into it thinking "If I don't get this job, I'm going to somewhere else and try for another one." So, when I came to Emory, there were only a few black nurses and I was like "Where are all the black nurses?"

Which wasn't the case in Arkansas? It was more diverse?

Well, I was used to that in Arkansas. Well, after the school opened up, more and more black people started going to school. But in comparison to, in ratio to the population, of how big Emory was and how small our hospital was, there were not a lot of black nurses. That changed pretty rapidly. So when I applied for the job, to be an ET nurse, that's a special thing, I was the first black one. I didn't apply for that job as head nurse: they appointed me and I didn't want it, my husband didn't want me to have it. So to answer your question, I met resistance after I got the job, but getting the job, no. Because I put myself out and I thought that I was a good interview and putting my best foot forward. And I already had a good background in making strides for myself. Even getting to the nurse exchange program, no black nurse at Emory had applied. And I saw these white girls coming back, talking about their experiences that they had had and I'm like "I wanna do that." And I thought "If they can do that, I can do it." And I applied, wrote a proposal and went to the committee and they chose it and I won. So I think that a lot of times, we don't get stuff – because one of my friends was going to Grady to apply for this job in the neurology department and she was talking to me, she said: "I'm going to Grady" (she was working at Emory) "I'm going to Grady, they got a new job in the neurology department for a manager and I'm gonna apply for that" and I said "Well, what's the problem" and she said "Well I'm probably not gonna get it." I said "Well, if you go there with that attitude, you're probably not gonna get it." I said "Are you qualified? Have you worked into neurology before?", she said "Oh yeah, that's my background." I said "Well then you have to go and sell yourself, you let them know you know this job and let them know what you're going to bring to the job." She got the job! She came back, she told me "Thanks for the pep talks" so yeah. I don't feel that I missed out on anything because of my race. I don't FEEL like I have, I might have but because I had the attitude that I'm good enough for this and I can do it, so I can learn it.

But you said you met some resistance after you got the job?

Well, when I became head nurse, when you come out from among your peers and you become the leader, you almost always meet resistance. There are changes that you're gonna have to put into place. And you do become a different person. Because I can't be your leader and be your best friend too. Because you're gonna want me to do favoritism for you and I can't do that, not if I'm gonna be a good leader. So I wanted to be a fair leader and in trying to do that, I did meet some resistance, on both sides.

Well, thank you so much for sharing all of this.

Second part:

You told me you moved to Atlanta because one of your friends was there?

Yes, I had a girlfriend from my hometown, that grew up in the same hometown that I did, although she was younger but we were really good friends, friends of the family. She lived here in Atlanta and after I got a divorce, she tried to convince me to come to Atlanta. I got a

divorce in 1982 but I wasn't ready to move, I was recovering from my bad divorce and everything. But in the midst of that, I did go back to school to get a bachelor's degree in nursing. After I completed that, then I felt like – there were a lot of unhealthy things going on in my hospital, they were laying off people and things were not good. It was a small hospital, so I felt like it was time for me to move on personally and professionally. After the divorce and after completing my education, I wanted to a different challenge. I'm the type of person who needs to have some type of a challenge to keep going. So I came to visit her and then in the process of that, I went on to interviews and really fell in love with Atlanta and all the different opportunities for nursing and people in the medical profession that were available here. So that was the main reason for me moving 'cause I didn't have anything to keep me in my hometown, my kids were grown. As a matter of fact, all my kids had moved away, two daughters, one in California and my son was in New York but he came back. So I had nothing to tie me down so it was a good time to move.

And do you remember what your friend was doing in Atlanta?

Yes, she was a real-estate appraiser. That's a person who, if you have property and want to sell, it has to be appraised for the price of the home and that's what she did. She then took another job working for the county but at the time that's what she did.

And she went to school in Arkansas like you?

Yes.

OK. You also had a house in Arkansas before moving?

Yes, my husband and I, when things were going great between us — it was kind of a seesaw marriage, up and down – we built a four-bedroom house when our kids were small, my youngest was in the second or third grade. We built a house and after the divorce, I was awarded the house. And so I lived in a house and was paying for it but when I moved here, I rented the house to some people and I kept it for about four years. In the end I sold it after four years and the selling of the house gave me the money for the down payment on this house.

Was it difficult to built that house in Arkansas?

No, we actually built the house in 1971 or 72 and actually it was expensive at the time because of the payment system, we were not making a lot of money but in actuality the house only cost us about \$17,000 back then to build from the ground. And we had a big yard, a big front yard and everything. We got a FHA loan cause my husband had been in the service so it wasn't that hard to get the loan.

You mentioned that some of your children joined you in Atlanta?

Yes, when I first moved here in 1987, my second daughter's husband was in the Navy as well and they had been living in Queens, NY. Well, the Navy was sending him to Long Beach to school but he was gonna be housed on the base. So she was gonna come to Arkansas and stay with me but in the process of that, I was moving here. So she came and moved with me and stayed with me for 3 months until he got out of school and then she went to California. And they've been over then since.

Any other children that joined you in Atlanta?

Oh yes, my son later came. He came later. I moved here in February of 87 and so my daughter came with me. Well, actually, I came and I stayed 6 weeks with my friend. I didn't bring anything but my clothes and uniform because I was going to work. So I came back within 6 weeks and moved all my furniture – I had gotten the apartment. But when I went back to move my furniture, my daughter that is now in California with her husband who was in school, she came and moved with me and we set up in my apartment. In 3 months, she left and went to join her husband in Long Beach, CA. Then my youngest son who was still living in Arkansas, he moved to Atlanta and lived with me in the apartment. And in 1999, my oldest daughter moved to Arkansas and came to live with me as well. So at that time there was me and two of my children living here.

And were they able to find jobs here and stay?

Yes, as a matter of fact, my daughter after being here a couple of weeks, maybe 3, she went on – my son he had made acquaintances with some people that worked at what is now Verizon but at the time it was MCI. It was a telephone company and his friend got my daughter an interview and she got the job and so she's been working with that company ever since.

What about your son?

He found a job. My son has – he likes to do his own thing. He is a painter, he does home improvement so he works for himself.

But eventually, they were both able to stay in Atlanta?

Oh yes, they've also been here ever since. But now my daughter is in Florida. My son is still here. He lived in Florida for a short while but decided to come back so he's here now. He lives in Atlanta.

In DeKalb county?

Yes.

I also had a question about the process of moving to your house in Stone Mountain. I was wondering if the person you worked with to find your house, was that person black or white?

He was black and he was a real estate agent and he was recommended by a friend of mine that was in BNN. And that was the unique thing about BNN: it was a great mentoring, relationship and a great source of information if you needed something. You just asked somebody in BNN and if they didn't know how to do it, they would know someone or knew someone that knew someone and so that was how I got my real estate agent. And he was a black agent and he was very good at what he did but I have to say to you Nicolas, it wouldn't have mattered to me had he been white because what I needed was someone that was good at what they do and knew what they did. But also I wanted someone that wasn't going to pressure me into settling for something that I wasn't happy with.

Was it important for you to live in a black neighborhood?

Well, it didn't really matter because when I moved into this house, many of my surrounding neighbors were white although many of them moved out and moved somewhere else. The biggest issue for me was the price and what I was getting for my money. And how well the subdivision was kept up.

Was it the first time you lived in a predominantly white area?

Yes, it was cause when I lived in Arkansas, it was pretty much predominantly black area.

So you also told me that you were living with your niece?

Yes, it's my great-great niece. She's from Flint, Michigan.

How does she feel about Atlanta?

Well, apparently she loves it because she came here to go to college, she went to Spelman college. She graduated from Spelman in 2014. When she graduated, she didn't want to go back to Michigan and so I invited her to live with me until she decided what she wanted to do with her life. And so she's been with me ever since. In undergrad, she studied political science with the thought that she was gonna go to law school but she was working with a program that worked with kids and she was in that program. And she got a job as a teacher's assistant at the school where she is now. She was working with the kindergarten kids and then she found out she loved working with the kids and then she decided to go back and get her masters and now she's a second grade teacher.

And she wants to stay here?

Yes.

You mentioned you were one of the first black nurses at Emory?

No, I was one of the first black wound-care nurses. When I went to Emory, I was interested in doing that. Actually I was interested in that before I ever came here but there wasn't an avenue for me to pursue it in Arkansas. So when I got here, I saw that there was an avenue to me to pursue that. They hired me and sent me back to school so that's how it came about. But I was hesitant to apply for it because the nurses that were there doing that were white. And I thought "Hum, let me see." And so I talk to one of the nurses and one that was already there was pregnant and she was leaving and she wasn't coming back so they were interested in hiring someone else. I went and apply and they hired me and sent me back to school. And I worked in that position for 18 years, until I retired.

I guess you met a lot of people through BNN and I was wondering if they were mostly people that were not from Atlanta?

Well, I don't think – we may have 1 or 2 people that was from Atlanta but the majority – I would say 99% of the people in BNN were from somewhere else.

Did you find it difficult to actually meet locals?

No, I didn't because the church where I joined had a lot of people from Atlanta. It wasn't hard at all.

Because some of the people I interviewed told me about, you know, sometimes, tensions between transplants and locals. Is that something that you experienced?

I can truthfully say that it is not something that I experienced and I think a lot of that Nicolas has to – the individual has to own that. And a lot of this has to do with how you present yourself to people and how you perceive yourself. Because sometimes we come with pre-ideas and notions about what a place and what a person is like and so I didn't experience at all. Whereas a lot of people have, they say that Atlanta is cliquish and that may be for people who are trying to move in certain circles, which I was not. So I can't say I experienced that.

In what circles?

Well, in the circles where you tried to move up in society so to speak. That kind of things.