

Gladys Facey (Parker St. Apartments)

Interviewed by Dariza Mora and Johniesha Smith

My name is Gladys Elizabeth Chute Facey. I was born in 1922. I was named after an Aunt on my father's side of the family, but on my mother's side, all of the girls had the middle name 'Elizabeth.' It was a family tradition. My nickname is 'Snooky.' When I was little, there was a comic character called Snooky Yokum, so my father thought that sounded cute for me. My mother was Velva Bowles Chute, and my father was James H. Chute.

I was born in Boston on Columbus Ave. at the New England Hospital for Women and Children. I grew up in Somerville at my grandmother's house — that was my father's mother's house. On his side of the family, everybody always had their own home. I didn't even know about apartments until I was grown up and came to Boston. I thought everybody had houses!

My father managed a coal yard. You wouldn't know what that was, but in those days, trains ran on coal, houses and businesses were heated with coal. So they had chutes for loading and unloading the coal off and onto trucks and trains. And, when the railroad car pulled into the yard full of coal, someone had to manage getting the coal to where it was going. That's what my father's job was.

So I lived with my grandmother, and went to school in Somerville. In my family there were other children, but they all died. So, I grew up as an only child. I was the youngest person in the house, so I got into mischief more often than anyone else. The most important things when you lived with my grandmother were school and church. Those were the two things you had to do — go to school, and go to church on Sundays. I grew up in the Episcopal Church, and so when I got old enough, after my confirmation, I got to sing in the choir. I also had to attend Sunday school after church, so it was an all morning affair. And if I was too sick to go to Sunday school, then I couldn't go out anywhere else either.

I played with my cousins and the neighborhood kids. We played outdoor games and card games. No, there was no fighting, we mostly got along. We had a garden in our back yard. Our house was upstairs and downstairs, and there was an attic and a basement or cellar. So on rainy days, we use to play in the cellar. There was a big old furnace you could run and hide behind, and there were coal bins. It was a lot of fun!

I went to public school. I didn't really have a favorite teacher, but I had a favorite principal when I got to junior high school. Somehow he got to know me by my *whole* name. In those days, they called you 'Miss such and such' or 'Miss so and so.' They didn't call you by your first name because it was too personal. So the principal got to know me, and if there was any mischief happening at school, mine was the first name called out. I was always getting into something! But I liked him, and he liked me. There weren't many Blacks in Somerville in those days, so if anybody picked on me, he would be there.

In Somerville, there were a lot of Italian families. There were very few Black families, and the ones that lived there mainly owned their own homes. So we got to be friends with the Italians. My girl friends were two Italian girls. One friend was my age and we went to school together. The other one was an older girl who was the sister of my cousin who lived in the house with me. It was a nice community, and everybody got along fine. Some of the neighbors just came from Italy. They didn't speak very good English, so the kids had to interpret for their parents sometimes.

Rules? Oh yes, my grandmother was *very* strict. I really couldn't do very much. When I was fifteen or sixteen years old, I still had to be in the house by nine o'clock. That didn't mean 9:01 or 9:02, it meant 9 o'clock! And if I wasn't IN the house by nine o'clock I would get a serious punishment. That meant I couldn't go off the front porch for one whole week. Not anywhere! So I didn't have a chance to get in trouble. The only time I really had fun, was once-a-year all the churches use to have a big family picnic. Everyone came from everywhere, and that was the only time you'd see some of them all year. They had it at the Salem Willows. It was just ocean and sand, and you took your own picnic.

When I was young, the things that scared me were scary movies. I would jump under the chair and scream. But I use to love to go to them. The most fun when I was young? Well, we had the amusement park at Revere Beach. One time this boy asked me if I wanted to go on the roller coaster, and I told him 'no' because I was afraid of heights. But he called me a sissy, so I had to take the dare. I went on the roller coaster, and I remember going up, then it started down, and that's the last thing I remembered. When I woke up, I was across the street laying on a park bench by the beach, and there were cops, nurses, and the ambulance there. All I know is that *in my head* I was falling down, then when I woke up I didn't remember what happened. They said that had never happened before — someone passing out so completely. I was only about 13 or 14 years old, so naturally I never went on a roller coaster again.

I came to Boston to live with my other grandmother when I was about 15 or 16. They use to have girls and boys together in groups up at the house. We had a fireplace in that apartment, and we use to toast hot dogs and marshmallows in the fireplace. None of the kids had ever seen anything like that, so it was fun.

My first date? That wasn't until I was 17. I never had a date in Somerville with my other grandmother being so strict. I couldn't do anything! I remember, one time, this boy came to see me. I had told everybody that I was older — I think I was 13, and told everyone I was 15. He was 17 or 18. So, he came to the house and my grandmother answered the door. She said, "*What do you want?*" He said "*I came to see Snooky, can I see her?*" So my grandmother said, "*No, not until she's 21, and then, it won't be by the likes of you!*" I was so embarrassed, I cried for days. I cried so much that I didn't even want to go out.

Then I fell in love with my husband and wanted to get married. My father knew that we planned to get married, but he didn't tell anybody. My husband-to-be was afraid he might get arrested for me being a minor since I was only 17 when we started going together. Harry was five years older than me, and in those days the law was strict, so he made sure my father knew his intentions. His full name was William Henry Facey. Both of his parents were born in Jamaica, but his grandmother came from Scotland.

I got married in 1940 at 18. It was my senior year, and we ran off and got married—we eloped! So, I didn't finish high school. That just about killed everybody in my family, so I lost contact with the people in Somerville. When I got married, I lived in Boston, and, by the time I was twenty, I had my first child!

In the 1940's there was a war going on — World War II — so there were food shortages and you couldn't get a lot of things without special ration books. Food was rationed so there would be supplies for the troops. The government issued ration stamps so people could get butter, eggs, and other necessities. All the good things were rationed, so the only way you could get food was with those stamps.

In the 1950's, my kids were growing up, nothing much happened. But in the 1950s, I moved here to this project where I live now. I have lived in this same apartment for 53 years, so I was also here in the 1960's. I raised my children here, and now, I'm raising my grandchildren here, and they're almost grown now.

When I was your age, all I wanted was to be happy and raise my kids. I had one of each. My daughter was Sandra, and my son was Jimmy. Then, when I got older and my kids were teens, a lady brought her little girl baby to me and asked me if I

would please raise her. So that's how I got Cheryl. She's the white daughter that I raised, and she's now in her forties. Her children are Tremana and Amani. And I have probably cared for 35 other children from this neighborhood over the years.

When my daughter Cheryl was young, I would go to parent-teacher meetings at school, the teachers would just stare at me because I was Black and Cheryl was White. When she was at the Mary Curley School, she would introduce me and say "*This is my mother!*" She was very proud of me. When she introduced me to one teacher, he just looked at me like it was humanly impossible. He just didn't get it!

My favorite music? I like jazz, swing music was very popular in my day. My grandmother played the piano - nothing but classical music. So I listened to classical music, but I liked jazz and bebop music. I loved popular music, and I knew every band. My favorite singer was Billy Eckstine. One time a girl friend and I sneaked back stage when he was in town at Mechanics Hall. It's torn down now, but it used to be on Huntington Ave. All the big bands used to come there to play when they were in town. So to this day, I still have a photo of him and his autograph to me that I got backstage.

My favorite color is purple. But when I was younger my favorite color was black. From the inside out, everything was black. But now it's purple. Hobbies? Well, I really liked to sew, and I used to like to sew by hand. Now I can't see that well, and my hands shake, so it's hard for me to sew even with the machine.

Television? I like *Murder She Wrote* and *Seventh Heaven*., shows without too much drama. I don't watch anything scary and nothing with snakes! I can't stand snakes, so if one comes on the screen, I'm gone. My grandkids will tease me, and they'll say Nana come here, and they know I won't watch.

I don't really like sports, but I'll watch basketball, and sometimes, baseball. Football I don't really understand, but my grandson plays soccer. When I was young I wasn't allowed to play sports or take the stairs because I had a heart murmur. So I rode the elevator with the teachers. They were afraid of over-taxing my heart. I still have the same murmur. I'm eighty-six and I'm still here, so I guess it turned out OK.

I like summer best of all the seasons. It can never be too hot for me — I'm always cold. Summer is nice, too, because it's so easy to dress. You don't have to worry about what to wear. In the winter, you have to wear too many layers. My bones are very fragile, so the doctors have told me that if I fall, I'm guaranteed to break

something. And, nine times out of ten, it'll be a hip. So that doesn't inspire me to go walking.

My most exciting transportation story? Well, I've been on cruises — I've been to Bermuda two or three times. And, I've been to other parts of the Caribbean two or three times, too. I guess you could say those were my biggest adventures. The last cruise I was on, my grand daughter took me *first class*, and we were way up high on the ship. We had a kitchen, our own private patio, a big living room. We could go on the deck and be the only ones there. We had valet service. That was fun!

No, there's nothing I wished I had done when I was younger, but right now I'd like to live about 15 more years until I make 100. The happiest moment of my life was when my children were born. Also, when I got married and left my strict grandmother's house. I knew nothing about sex or anything else, so my husband use to call me a *poor country girl*, because I didn't know nothing from nothing!

What makes me happy now is to see how successful my grand kids are, you know, because my own two kids are dead. My son, who was the oldest, was a Boston Police officer. He retired from the force and moved to Jamaica. Then after his retirement, he got sick. He use to come home every year around Thanksgiving, he'd stay until Christmas, and then go home. But, the last time he came, when he went back, they said he had a heart attack and he died. I had so much trouble trying to get his body returned, but the Boston Police force finally sent someone there to claim his body and bring him back.

Then, my daughter, Sandra, died of breast cancer when she was in her 40's. She was like my little doll when she was born. So when she died, it broke my heart. Her daughter Dawne lives with me. She graduated from Wellesley College and Harvard Law School, and she's a lawyer now in Boston.

Things I look forward to when I get up in the morning? Well, I'm glad to get up! I say thank you God! My wish is to die in my sleep, because I don't want to be sick or in pain and linger. So I have to say 'thank you Lord, you let me get up!' And I try to make the best of each day.

My greatest accomplishment is my grandkids. I am very proud of them. And once my youngest one, Amani, goes to college, my life will be fulfilled. Once they all come back and say, "*Nana, I made it. I got my degree,*" I'll be happy.

I think the hardest thing I had to do was overcome a fear. My husband and I had been married for over 55 years when he died. Remember, he was my first boyfriend, then I married him, so what do I know? Somehow or other, he got sick,

and once he got sick, he was more worried about me than he was about himself. What was I going to do if I got sick? Well, one time I did get sick, and I was away for six months. That really upset me, and use to pray that I'd get better, and thank God, I came through it all right.

Well, I'd have to say my best friend is Julia Martin. And my grandmother is the person that I most admired. Everyone called her "Ma," even neighbors. My grandmother was always there for us. All she had to do was look at you, and I swear if you were lying, she would know it! So we didn't lie.

My advice to you? Well, just live a good clean, healthy, happy life. That's all. And stay in school and get a good education. Don't get silly about some boy. School is first. You can have boy friends, but finish school first.