

Julie Kennedy

Interviewed by Tonicia Malley, Rocky Cotard & Nigel Hensley

My name is Julie Kennedy. My grandmother on my father's side of the family was Julia. My sister Margaret *should* have been named after her because she looks more like my grandmother. I look more like my mother. I don't really have a family nickname. When I was young I played for a softball team called *The Wildfire*, and they used to call me '*Flame*.' I got used to it because later, my daughter used to say it and it made me laugh.

I was born on August 2, 1940 in McCormick County, South Carolina. My parents didn't raise me, my grandmother did, because I was one of fourteen children. So I lived in a little small town called Troy with my grandmother and my cousins. The weather was kind of like it is here, but not as bad. It would be a rare thing to get snow there in those days, but I think they do get a little snow there once in a while now.

It was the country and the houses were far apart, but the house my grandmother lived in was one of those big southern houses. It was huge and it had everything. My family is Black, but this was a huge house like a rich White person would have. There were quarters where the workers would stay, but they weren't using that part. Have you ever seen those plantation houses in the movies? It was like that. The house was beautiful and the yard was beautiful with flowers and everything. I was eight or nine

years old when my grandmother passed away, then I had to come up here to live with my family in Boston, and their house seemed like a shack.

So I lived with my mother and father, Margaret and David Settles, and with my brothers and sisters: David, Leonard, Charles, Johnny and George, Helen, Margaret, Eula, Jeanette, Pauline, Daisy and Geneva. I hope I didn't leave anybody out — my memory is so bad these days. Three of them have passed away now. I never knew one of my older sisters because she died before I was born. And my youngest brother is about the same age as my oldest child. He's fifty-three now.

One school I went to here in Boston was the Timilty. When I went there they offered cooking, wood shop, and sewing, but they don't offer all of those things anymore. I think I learned how to cook there, and I learned a little from my mother, too. I don't know what happened to all of that stuff! You have to go to a special school, like a trade school, to learn those things now. I liked high school. We had a lot more going on when we were in high school than you do now. We had cooking, art, woodworking, sewing, upholstering, we had a lot of things.

I do remember one teacher I had at the Timilty, her name was Mrs. O'Neal. She was a real nice White lady. The teachers used to stay after school and help us with our work. I don't think they do that any more. You know, I don't understand why there are so many problems in the schools today. Back in the day when I was in school, it didn't seem like there was as much prejudice or fighting in schools as there is now.

I don't remember us ever having a TV when I was growing up. Our father was very strict so we really didn't get to go out. He never let us go out to be with friends or do anything. So we were in the house most of the time, and the most we could do was be out on the front porch talking with friends. And since we didn't go out, we didn't need rules! But I do remember us playing marbles. That was the thing I loved the best.

Oh yeah, we had a lot of chores. We had to do all of the cooking and cleaning. We had an old furnace that we had to go down and put the coal in every morning. So we did all of the chores.

There's a lot that I don't remember. My sister tells me that I had a good childhood, but I just blocked it out. I don't remember a lot of it, but one memory I do have is that one time I needed a new blouse for Easter Sunday. I couldn't get it myself, but when I woke up on Easter Sunday morning, my mother had gotten one for me and I was so surprised.

When I was a teenager my favorite place to go was Franklin Park. It was a really nice place to go on Sundays. That was the best thing because on all of the concession stands were open out on the walkway. It was always crowded with people and it was free. So people would go over there and sit on the grass and have a Sunday picnic. I'm glad it's still here even though it's not crowded like it used to be.

One of my dreams when I was your age was probably to have a nice place to live. I don't really remember a dream, but that's one thing I wanted. Back in my time, I don't think we really had anybody to look up to like you

young people do now. Right now it seems like White people know more about Black history than we do. It's like they tried to keep it away from us. I was just reading recently about some people who were important in Black history, and I never heard of them. It's new to me, and it's kind of fascinating to find out about all of these people that contributed to Black history. One man I was reading about was a psychiatrist back in the 1800's. He got paid \$24 a week *and* he had a part-time job as an elevator operator for \$4 a week.

Well, the biggest change after high school was that I had to get a job! And all the money we kids made, our father took it. I used to work at an electronics place and I liked that. I liked it because it was a small business, so you got to know everybody, and we all got along. Then I had another job wiring florescent light fixtures, but that job folded. Then, I applied for another job, but I didn't get it because they didn't believe that women could do that kind of work!

I got married young. I was either 17 or 19, I forget, but it was one of those ages. My husband's name was James, and we got married here in Boston. I had five children: Joyce, James, Jeffrey, Jerry, and Jeannelle. I'd have to say that raising my five children has been my greatest accomplishment. I raised them all by myself.

From the 1960's I remember the day when President Kennedy got shot. It seemed like the clouds got dark that day. I don't remember a lot from the 1970's, I *was* still playing softball. In fact, I played softball until I was almost in my sixties. I played in the Roxbury/North Dorchester League,

and our team was called *The Wildfire!* I was one of the oldest players along with one other woman — we were the oldest people still playing!

The hardest thing in my life happened before I moved here to Spencer House. It was the hardest thing I ever had to face. I had gotten very depressed because my daughter had to sell the house and I thought I was going to be homeless. Then someone gave me the name of a person who helps elder people, and I was very lucky. They put my name in the lottery to get a space here and I got it. So, once I got settled here I started getting over it. But it was a hard thing to take. There were problems between my daughter and my son. He decided to take his name off the mortgage, and she couldn't afford it by herself. So she decided to put it on the market instead of letting it go into foreclosure, and luckily It sold in thirty days.

We had all lived there together and it was very depressing to see it all fall apart. It was my happiest time to have my whole family living together in that house, so I miss that. We had to split up and now we're all in different places. But what makes me happy now is that I'm comfortable. I get up in the morning I look forward to going downstairs to fitness. I like having that to look forward to. Sometimes I might have an appointment to go to. It's nice.

One important thing I've learned is that I wish I would have saved more money back in the day, then maybe I wouldn't be in the predicament that I'm in now. People can't save money anymore — they need it to make ends meet. They hardly make enough to pay the bills, so how can they save?

No, I don't remember having any real adventures. I am about to visit my son, though. That will be the first time I've left town since I came here when I was a kid. I'm afraid to travel — I'm not kidding. There's so much violence that it makes me afraid. I'm at the point I don't trust nobody. It's terrible.

The most important lessons that I can pass onto you are to stay in school, don't do drugs, and, for young girls, don't get pregnant at a young age. Those are the most important things.

My hope is just to see us all get along. No matter what race or ethnic group we belong to, we're all God's children and I would like to see us get along.