

Katie Green (Parker St. Apartments)

Interviewed by Jessica Harris

My name is Katie Green. I was born in Arkansas on July 6, 1942. The place where I grew up was rural; it was back in the woods. And, it was warm where I grew up, not as cold as here — more seasonal. I lived in different places, because when I was about four years old, my mother died, and me and my sisters and brothers were all separated. My mother's name was Inary Green, and my father's name was Willie C. Green. My oldest sister was Della Mae, then next was my brother Jackson Washington Jr. I also had a brother Willie, a brother named Robert, and twin sisters, named Geraldine and Erline.

After my mother died, I was sent to Mississippi to live with my father, and they say I cried the whole time. I wanted to come home to my aunt's house, so I lived with my aunt in a little city where she was a cook. I lived with her from when I was about 5 to 10 years old. Then later, I lived mostly with my grandparents. My Grandmother's name was Elnora Vanzant and my Step-Grandfather was Marshall Vanzant. There were 6 of us kids growing up with them — me, my two brothers, and my cousins. One of my cousins was the oldest and one was the youngest, and my brothers were the ones who got into the most trouble.

When we were little kids we would jump rope or play hide and seek. Then we played card games like Old Maid and FISH. When I was your age I went to church, mostly, because when we weren't in the fields, there wasn't much else to do! Sometimes we went to the movies, and I liked reading and sewing. When we got home from school, we would have chores to do. We would have to get the wood and bring it in. We had to feed the chickens and bring in the eggs — things like that. And since I was the only girl, I would have to iron. I hated that! My grandmother would do all the cooking, so I didn't have to do that, but I would wash the dishes. We also had to go out to the fields to pick cotton, so it wasn't all that much fun, but that's how it was at the time. They didn't need any rules to keep us at home because there was no place else to be.

Our neighborhood was country, so it was very quiet. There was a house here and a house there, but it wasn't like here. Yes, there were all kinds of people, Black and White. I remember there was a White family down the street. We would go down to their house and watch TV, or watch the fights, or *The Little Rascals* show. Even when the marches and protests were going on at that time, we didn't have any trouble in our area.

My best friend was named Ella Mae Mitchell. She used to come to the house, and we would do girl things. We would play games and sit around and tell jokes. We use to laugh! When I was younger, I can't remember the names of most friends, because I moved a lot and lived in different places. It was so long ago.

When I got older, once in a while we'd be able to go into town, but it was seldom. My grandfather was strict, and as I said, there was nowhere to go — no place to sneak to. And down there, if someone saw you trying to sneak off somewhere, they'd tell! So, very seldom did I get in trouble with my family. But I can remember one time I really DID. Me and my cousin were outside, and she had a cigarette. She dropped the cigarette, and all she kept saying was, "*Uh, Oh, Uh, Oh.*" Instead of putting it out, she just kept saying that. So all of us got in trouble. because she could have burned the house down. And, I got a beating that I will never forget.

And as teenagers we did get into mischief sometimes. Like on a Sunday, when we left church, there were a couple of people in the group that liked to smoke. So after church we might go down in the woods. We'd have shorts on, so we'd go into the lake and swim, or maybe smoke, or swing on the vines. That was one way we got into mischief.

I can remember going to a little two room school house. Then, in the higher grades I went to a big school in Forest City, AK. Yes, I liked school. My favorite subject was probably Math. My grandparents were share-croppers, and there was no opportunity down south for Black people at that time. I went to all segregated schools. I can remember we would have to go upstairs at the movies, and the White people would be downstairs. I remember those days.

My family wasn't really affected so much by things going on like the war or other events, because we were out in the country. It didn't really change anything. I was just born in 1942, so I don't remember World War II, but I remember my grandmother speaking about it.

For me, the biggest thing that happened in the 1940's was that my mother died So, I had to go to live with my father and stepmother. They had six kids, and those kids were really mean to me. All I did was cry because I wanted to get back home. So they finally sent me back home on a Mississippi River boat. That's something I'll always remember because being on that ferry over water — that was scary.

In the 1950's we had a wood stove, and we didn't have oil or gas or running water. We had to go out and pump the water from the well. Then we had to heat it if we

wanted to take a bath or wash the dishes. My grandmother cooked on that wood stove, and she was really a good cook! Later, when I moved to Buffalo we had running water —warm water — and I thought I had gone to heaven. What a difference that was! Just like how it was going from a typewriter to a computer. I remember when I went to secretarial school, we had these old typewriters. Later, at my job, first we got electric typewriters, then we got computers, and that was a real big difference, too.

So, after I graduated from high school, I moved to Buffalo, New York in the 1960's. You know I hated working out in the fields, it was really hard. So I told my grandparents, "*I love you, but I'm not doing this any more.*" I lived with my cousin in Buffalo, and I worked at a restaurant as a short order cook. I always wanted to be a nurse. That was my dream. But I went to nurses aid school and I got a certificate that let me work as a nurses aid.

Then one day, I think it was in 1967, my sister wrote me— I don't know how she found me —but I came up here, and we were all able to get together. Me, and all of my sisters and brothers eventually were able to get together, except for the one sister who had died. That was the happiest moment of my life.

I left New York, and I came to Boston in 1968. I had three girls. Their names are Elaina Perry, Valonia Green, and Latara Green. When I came to Boston, I said, "*I've got to do something!*" So I went to secretarial school and I got a trade— typing. Then I took the civil service test and I got a good job. I worked at that job for 23 years as an administrative assistant until I retired. I liked that job because I had to deal with people, and it was regular hours, and it wasn't too hectic, so it was good.

When I was working, I had a slight stroke, and I had to stay in the hospital for about a week. I was running, trying to catch the bus home from work. And the pain hit me— you have like a headache on one side. And I said "*Oh my, what is this.*" I grabbed my eyes, then by the time I got home, my whole side, half of me, was numb. My oldest daughter was graduating from Blessed Sacrament up here. She and my sister's daughter were in the same class. But I said, "*I don't feel well, so you all go on,*" and I went to bed. Then that Monday when I went back to work, my boss asked me how did I feel. I said, "*I don't feel well.*" So he sent me down to the nurse, and the nurse took my blood pressure and she said I had to go to the hospital. They told me I had a slight stroke, but I was lucky.

I think probably the hardest thing that ever happened to me was when my grandmother died. Because she raised me, and we were very close. That's what

brought on the stroke, the grief of losing someone close like that, I think. The most important thing I learned from my family growing up? Well, one was to stay out of trouble. I think basically it was my grandmother who gave me guidance. She was the person I most admired, because she raised me and my brothers, then she raised her daughter's kids. And she would never turn anybody away. If the kids from down the street would come to the house, they would come in and eat. They were welcome at our table, and there was always plenty of food to eat.

Oh, yes, I know how to drive, but I don't drive. I use to drive a little bit down home, but I'm scared to drive up here. People are rushing around going *shoom, shoom, shoom*. They're too crazy! Everybody is in a big hurry! I learned to drive when I was in my twenties. My first driving experience was in my grandparents car. They had one of those cars that you just push the buttons. It was very easy to drive. There were no gears or anything. But, you know how it is, down there people just take it more easy.

The biggest adventure I've had was raising my three kids, because I raised them by myself — three girls. And I had to work, so they went to day care. Then later, they stayed with Ms. Facey in the summer time. She would keep them, and all she charged was \$5 a week. All you had to do was bring a gallon of milk once a month. Day care now is unbelievable. She just did it out of the goodness of her heart, you know. She's a really good person.

What I wish I had done? Well, I just wish that back then we had the opportunity to get an education like these kids do now. I wish I could have gotten a good education. No, I don't want to do it now! Now that I'm retired, I'd just like to travel. That's the thing I want to do more of now. Seeing the world, and seeing all the things you missed while working and raising kids. Now that I'm retired and I don't have to work, I can do what I want to do. There's no more hustle and bustle! I can get up when I want to, go to bed when I want to, go out when I want to, I like it. When I get up in the morning, I'm happy just to be here, being alive, being healthy. Some people can't even get out. I get up every morning and go get the paper. Then I eat my breakfast, take my medicine, I go to exercise class three days a week, so it's great.

My greatest accomplishment is probably having a job and raising my kids. For a lot of time I worked two jobs. I used to work up at Sherrill House with the seniors, and you know, that was good. Yeah — making a difference — just like you all are doing. You learn from them, and even though they were sick, they still had something to offer. And they looked forward to me coming, so it was good.

My favorite kind of music? I like Blues and Gospel. But I don't like the modern gospel music so much, no I don't! My favorite song would have to be The Temptations *My Girl*. I like that song. And for spiritual songs I also like the Five Blind Boys and The Staples Singers. I like Discovery Channel, and the Detective Channel. Those are the kinds of TV programs I like, and I like to watch the news. I like programs that are informative — you can find out a lot. Yes, I like golf, I like bowling. And I like football, basketball. No, I didn't play sports at school, but as kids, we did play baseball.

My favorite seasons would be spring and fall. Because I like it not too hot and not too cold. I like it just right, and that's what they are.

Words of wisdom? Yes, I would tell you to strive to be the best that you can, and don't let nobody or nothing stop you. You know you're going to have tribulations and trials along your way, but just pray to 'The Man Upstairs' that you will be strong on your journey. Make sure you get a good education, so you don't have to depend on a man or nobody to take care of you. Be your own woman, be your own boss. And you'll do well.

So, my advice is to go to school, learn, and get that piece of paper, because then nobody can take that away from you. And think before you jump sometimes. Don't let anybody try to put something in your head, because you know what's right and what's wrong.