

Peace Drum Project
The Elder's Stories
2014

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Introduction

As we conclude our fourteenth year of *The Peace Drum Project* with these stories, it is always useful to remember why Cooperative Artists Institute (CAI) started this project back in 2000. It was created, in part, to address the fears that local elders had when encountering groups of young people on the streets or on the subway. Even though many elders have grandchildren and connect well with them, an encounter between elders and unfamiliar youth can sometimes be quite stressful for them. With their boisterous energy, baggy pants, hoodies, and penchant for moving in groups, teens can often feel quite intimidating to our older community members. CAI already worked with both teens and elders, and we believed that the power of the Arts combined with personal stories could bridge this divide between these two generations, so *The Peace Drum Project* was born.

Over the years, we have been truly gratified by how well this intergenerational conversation has worked. Hundreds of youth and elders have experienced a positive change in their lives. In evaluations each year, the teens themselves rank their time with the elders as one of their favorite activities of the project. Many teens have stayed in touch with the elders they interviewed, just as the elders have followed up on their teen partner's progress in school and in life. So, from our original goal, we know that we have created a powerful and lasting model for engaging young people with elders in a truly meaningful way. *The Peace Drum Project* helps to deepen the connections between youth and elders, and builds understanding and greater support for each group within the larger community.

As many of today's young people look forward to the future, they feel hope — but also anxiety about their ability to succeed, especially in these uncertain economic times. The whole landscape of jobs and meaningful work is in flux, so the career opportunities for young people today may be very different from what the elders

experienced in their early years. But, despite these changes, the lessons learned from the elder's experiences contain substantial wisdom, inspiration, and encouragement for having a happy, fulfilling life *even in difficult or uncertain times*. Some of the elders came from early lives of poverty and racial or other forms of discrimination, and yet they are full of humor, optimism, generosity, and spiritual grace. Many of them had hoped to go to college themselves, but were unable to because of economic constraints. Family came first, but neither responsibility nor hardship kept them from seeking their dreams.

The teens have learned, that nowadays these elders find happiness and security through ties to their families, friends, and — in some cases — their jobs and other activities in the community. This is a powerful message to young people who face unprecedented costs for getting an education today as well as the shifting sands of the meaningful work in the global marketplace. Life is never easy, but there are abundant rewards for hard work, civic engagement, caring relationships, flexibility, continuing education, and moving steadily forward towards your goals.

The resilience of the elders offers a road map for our teens who have this unique opportunity to connect with them, learn from their experiences, and honor their wisdom. In the words of Reginald L. Jackson, artist emeritus at AAMARP, *“My words of wisdom that I want to share with you are this: think about creating work that you truly love rather than looking for somebody else to provide it for you. Make a job rather than look for a job. That way you can get satisfaction, joy, and the resources you will need to survive.”* Charlene Badgett advises the teens to *“try to be as truthful as you can in everything you say and do.”* These words of wisdom and the elder's stories help the teens gain valuable insights that will serve them well all throughout their lives. Josephine Gaines has shown the teens by her example, what it means to live a truly generous life. And, every one of this year's stories will inspire all of us

with their spirit of adventure, their hard work and sacrifice, and their persistence in the face of great obstacles.

Sadly, we know that we have really only scratched the surface of each of these elder's stories in our interviews. But we are happy to have had the chance to meet them and learn about their lives. We hope that you, too, will be inspired by their stories. We are most appreciative to each of the elders who shared their experiences and knowledge with our teens this year. These stories provide a bridge between the generations, and create common ground that helps to build a stronger community for us all. Today's young people need more opportunities to work with elders because their stories teach us so much. Many hopes, dreams, and challenges remain constant across the generations, and knowing that others have faced similar obstacles and have overcome them gives power to youthful dreams and aspirations.

The teens who took part in producing these stories include: Rafael Baez, Laura Duran, Alizé Gilmore, Adrian Lombert, Tonicia Malley, Manuel Martinez, Michael Myers, Jenny Nguyen, Kimberly Romero, Nyah Romulus, and Marlisha Syverian. We thank them all for their respectful manner, lively energy, and curious questioning.

Special thanks to: Julia Martin and Cynthia Jimenez at Julia Martin House, and Aiesha Washington at ABCD for their help in recruiting wonderful elders. Thanks also to the Dudley Branch Library (BPL) for welcoming our exhibit of drums and circulating the stories in the community this year. Our special appreciation goes to Curtis Jones, CAI Director, and to Morgan Smith-Jones and Sierra Oliver for their volunteer support to make this year's project a success. And finally, a huge thank you to Gloretta Baynes of AAMARP Studios for her tremendous advocacy, time, and energy spent in support of the project this year.

We dedicate these stories to the memory of Charles M. Holley (1937-2006), creator of *The Peace Drum Project* and Co-founder of Cooperative Artists Institute. He is greatly missed by all who knew and worked with him over the years.

Susan E. Porter & Prema Bangera

Co-Directors of The Peace Drum Project

Cooperative Artists Institute

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Reginald L. Jackson

Interviewed by Jenny Nguyen and Sierra Oliver

My name is Reginald Jackson. Sometimes people call me Reggie or Reg. I was born in Springfield, MA on January 10, 1945. My mother and father were Leo Jackson and Katherine McCray. I'm the oldest child, then came my brother Lionel, and then my sisters — Margo, Chirlane, Cynthia, and Cheryl— Cheryl is the youngest, and she's around 54 or 55 now. When I was growing up in the 1950s and '60s, Springfield was a pretty homogeneous place. It was a very family and community oriented place. We lived in different parts of Springfield, and eventually moved out of Springfield.

We grew up in a community with a lot of relatives around, so we were well looked after. You couldn't get into too much trouble. At first I lived with my mother. When my mother went to hairdressing school in Baltimore, Maryland, I lived with my aunt and uncle. Then my mother remarried and my three sisters were born. So I guess we were a small unit at first, and then it got larger. But by that time I was on my way to college.

As a child, I went to a neighborhood school — the William N. DeBerry Elementary School in Springfield. After school, getting home usually took a while because we would hang out and walk through the neighborhood, and try to find things to get into. When I finally got home, there were always chores and homework to do.

When I was a child, my best friends were extended family members, so we did everything together. We swam, fished, played baseball, and went to Boy Scouts. We played around the neighborhood, and we liked playing games like cards and Parcheesi. When we were teenagers, we liked to go to the movies. Westerns were my favorite; I liked movies like *Shane*. My parents did have rules about when you had to

be home, and if you weren't, you'd get grounded. But, I never really had any problem with that.

At home, I had to wash dishes – that was one of my chores. I also had a dog, so I had to keep up with the dog. My room had to be cleaned. I had to shovel when it snowed. My stepfather refurbished homes, so we did the landscaping for him. I remember doing labor on Labor Day! I knew hard work!

In high school I had a fun time. I explored a lot. I had a wide network of friends. I went to a great school where most people got along. I took the bus in the mornings, did extra curricular activities, and got home late. Did I ever have a conflict or disagreement in those years? Sure I did, but nothing really stands out. Those years were pretty smooth sailing.

Some of the adventures that stood out to me during my teenage years were what we would often do on Saturday mornings. We would grab our fishing poles and bikes, and just take off. We were always going on those kinds of adventures. I also visited Indiana University, Ohio State University, and Atlantic City by train. These experiences prepared me for a lot of travelling later on in life.

My favorite teacher in high school was Mr. Robinson who ran the machine shop. I learned a lot from him because I worked for him in the woodworking and metal shop after school and at his house during the summers. I always thought I was going to be a printer because I was into graphic arts. In high school I enjoyed working in a print shop making cards and posters — things like that. I was also in Junior Achievement and we had one of the best companies in the state, so I thought I was going to be a businessman and have my own business.

In my senior year of high school, I was having trouble with algebra. My guidance

counselor just about told me I wasn't going to graduate and would have to repeat the year. That snapped me into reality, and I made up my mind to work really hard and finish on time. I did it with good grades and went to Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT). One of the most important lessons that I learned from my family was patience and perseverance, and they taught me to set goals. So, I got my Associate's Degree. After that, I went to art school in New Haven and later got both a BA and an MA in Graphic Design, Film, and Photography.

After I finished graduate school I went off to work in New York at the State University of New York (SUNY) at Stony Brook on Long Island. I was working in Health Sciences Communications where I got to know a number of social workers (in the school of Social Work). Then, before I knew it, I was working on a Master's degree in Social Work!

I found that as an artist, this was the content that I needed to communicate. I wanted to be able to be on top of my game, in terms of the craft of my profession, which at that point was film, photography, and graphics. My art and design skills were the vehicle and social work provided the content. Social work gave me the framework for all of that. I hadn't really considered it in a formal way before, but I think I would have gone in that direction anyhow.

For my fieldwork, I developed a program on Long Island to help young kids understand about their African heritage. We were actually able to raise money and go to Ghana with a group of young people, so this led me in a new direction that I hadn't really considered as an artist. You just never know where that path will take you.

In 1974, I came to Boston to teach at Simmons College. So I completed my MSW long distance, then I applied to Union Institute in Cincinnati, Ohio and completed my

PhD there. I did my fieldwork in Kenya and Brazil, and also did an internship with Allan Rohan Crite here in Boston's South End.

When I came to Simmons, Dana Chandler was a faculty member in the Department of Art. He went away one weekend and while he was gone someone trashed his studio. When he came back he was furious, so he decided to go over to Northeastern to see if there was studio space there that he could use. The Chair of the Department of African-American Studies, Ramona Edelin, thought that they could find a space. They gave him the whole second floor of 11 Leon Street across from the African American Institute. It was a huge space, so Dana immediately said, "*Maybe we can get some other artists to use the rest of this space.*" So it was subdivided into 12 studios, and I was one of the first artists to be part of AAMARP (African American Master Artists-in-Residency Program).

When I got married I was fifty years old and my wife, Christle, was thirty-five! I met my wife Christle because she's the niece of Betty Rawlins, one of my colleagues at Simmons College. We were married at the Museum of the National Center of African American Artists in Roxbury, and everybody was welcome to come. We had the ceremony outside.

I've never really had a burning desire to go way back to trace my family genealogy, but my wife does. And now, I want to know too. I haven't really spent much time on it, but it's important. Do you know about The Church of the Latter Day Saints? They're based in Salt Lake City, Utah. As part of their religion, everyone has to know who they are and where their people are from. So the church has invested a lot in research tools. Many of them are online these days and they're available to everyone! There are marriage certificates, death certificates, and birth certificates. There are records of when you get a pension from a job, or if you're fighting a war and when

you're discharged. They have records of all of these things. The Church has made a business of acquiring all of this information and storing it at their center in Salt Lake City. So, if you're really curious about your background, you can use their database to search online.

We haven't researched back that far yet — maybe three or four generations. We've been able to trace my grandmother, whose last name was Quashie. Because of the way it's spelled, we've been able to find it through the Church database all the way to Ghana, West Africa. We've been there a couple of times and we actually found the Quashie household. They have a story that's been published about how there were Quashies who were performers for the royalty in the area. They went out to perform for these folks on a big boat. Then when the boat was gone, no one ever heard from them again.

We know there are also Quashies in the Caribbean, and all along the coast of West Africa. There are also some in Brooklyn, New York where my sister lives, and there are Quashies all over the United States. This particular spelling separates this group of Quashies (our relatives) from the rest of them. At some point, I believe I will get to find out exactly where those folks are and who they are. As you get older, tracking down your family will probably mean more to you.

The resources online today are just amazing. There is so much information you can get. Sometimes it can be kind of dry unless you find out some great detail that fills in the picture. Even though it was expensive to travel back in the old days, people just went. They went for all kinds of reasons. They went for work or to find a better place to live, and they went great distances.

One of my wife's relatives fought for the British in the War of Independence, so he was a Black Loyalist. Some of them were probably slaves at one time. The British

promised them land in Nova Scotia for fighting on their side. The British lost, so her relatives went up to Nova Scotia afterwards. They weren't given the land they were promised, but they stayed and they are still there in Nova Scotia. It's fascinating stuff. You can find out a lot about people and how they connect with one another in ways that you really couldn't even dream up.

When I think back to the 1950s and 1960s, I remember the first black and white television. I remember Sputnik, the first Russian satellite. President Kennedy was assassinated, and then so were Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. I was drafted into the army, but I was exempt because I had a form of flat feet. I was against the war anyhow. I was in graduate school then, and I was a part of a demonstration at Yale University. A group of us founded a group called The Black Workshop. We were arrested for doing vernacular art and trying to set up a school within the school. We made a film called One Way documenting the formation and activities of the group. This was one of the first community development centers in the country, so I was very engaged.

One of the biggest adventures I had during that time period — in 1968 — was a collision between members of The Black Workshop, the Provost of Yale, and the Dean of Art and Architecture School. We even met with the President of Yale. One of the group members pinned down one of the officials to try to get them to really listen.

The hardest things that I've had to face is actually the daily reality of racism. Particularly, institutional racism which really affects the way we behave. It is so much a part of who we are in this country. It's been going on for close to four hundred years and it just doesn't evaporate.

The best job that I have ever had is the job I do now. I work for myself. I started a non-profit called Olaleye Communications, Inc. in 1986, and after thirty years of

teaching, I retired. Now I am a visual artist and a community worker. I help artists, historians, and scholars do cultural and visual research. I exhibit public art, design websites, and work on projects involving international relations.

The happiest moments of my life are when I get up every morning. I am able to be alive and to be on the planet. That alone says there is hope and opportunity to make a difference. My words of wisdom that I want to share with you are this: think about creating work that you truly love rather than looking for somebody else to provide it for you. Make a job rather than look for a job. That way you can get satisfaction, joy, and the resources you will need to survive.

To learn more about Reggie and his work, go to: <http://www.olaleye.org/>

Jackie Thomas

Interviewed by Marlisha Syverain & Tonicia Malley

My name is Jackie Thomas. My nickname is Tiny or JT. I am seventy-two years old. I was born on August 10, 1941. I was born in Washington D.C. but I was raised in Boston, MA. There were people of many different races in my neighborhood, and everybody knew each other.

My mother's name is Gladys Octavia Thomas. My mother's parents' last name was Bird. My father's name is Franklin Pierce Thomas — he was born in 1905. He was the oldest child in his family growing up. I don't have much knowledge about any of my grandparents. My father said that his parents died early in his lifetime. When he was twelve, he and his brother just left Baltimore, Maryland on their own, and the state authorities never caught them.

My father took care of his younger brother, Toots, until he was grown. It was a struggle. They moved from city to city and town to town in the South. At night they would take their little bags into the graveyard and sleep there. It was the safest place one could go to in those days. In the wintertime, they would go into the crypts. You know what that is? It's a building at the graveyard where they keep bodies inside. My father and his brother would make a little fire and keep warm. There would be nobody there but them! That's how they survived.

I just loved hearing him tell us those stories. In the daytime they would go into town, and then at night they would go back to the graveyard until they moved on to another graveyard. It was not against the law. He would tell my siblings and me the stories, and we listened just fine. I heard everything he said but nobody else did. They would say,

“Oh, daddy’s just talking.” He worked all the time. So when he did get home, we were all over him. We would ask, “Where have you been?” and “How come we don’t see more of you?” — all of those kid questions.

My father was working from sun up to sun down. We knew he was there, but we were busy going to school, playing out on the street, running errands, you know. But at five o’clock we had to be home! I don’t care what happened. I would grab Shirley, my sister, and go. My mother was the boss. She was the one who whipped you, as they called it in those days. She didn’t do a whole lot of whipping, but she would spank us. Then we could go on about our business. She would always tell us to go outside.

At home, we had a big wall where my mother would put up paper and she would write everybody’s name with a chore next to it every day. I did everything Monday through Friday. What I didn’t do by Friday, I would do the next week. We didn’t do chores on the weekends. So, I did dishes, mopped floors, cleaned bathtubs, and made the beds. I would go downstairs and get the wood and coal for the stoves — all of that stuff we needed to keep warm. And we had ice box duties. We called it an “ice box” back then. We had a little place where the ice was, so we would remove the pan and clean it. We did it all.

What I liked best about it was that we all ironed our own clothes. What I did, the boys did. There was no favoritism. Everybody cleaned up but Shirley, since she was the baby. My three brothers names are Harold, Frankie, and Winston, also known as “Winny.” We were all two years apart except for Shirley. We used to clean up the stairs and the sidewalk because we played outside. That was a good experience for my brothers and me. We all stuck together until we became teenagers and then we spread out.

When I was a little kid, I went to a Catholic school. The nun said, “Miss Jackie, Miss Precious. Somebody get me the switch. Pull up that skirt.” I thought she was going to

beat my legs. I wouldn't do what she said, so she pulled my skirt up over my head, but I was pulling it back before she realized it. One day I told my mother, "I am never going back to that school!"

"Why, have you been bad?" she asked.

"No, the teacher was bad," I said.

Then, I went to Abraham Lincoln Elementary School. It was not too far from where we lived growing up. In the wintertime it took much longer to get there because of the snow, but we still walked to school. When I got home after school, first I had to change into my play clothes. Then I had to do math and reading homework. I would help with chores like doing the dishes and preparing dinner. I would also watch Howdy Doody on television.

My favorite teacher was Miss Gladys. She was my third grade teacher. I was kind of a laid back kid. Once there were no other kids around, I stayed after school and we'd do math. I'd stay about an hour and she would teach me how to write correctly. She put a lot of work into me and it paid off. I'd say, "I can't do this!" Then she'd say, "Just because you say you can't do it doesn't mean that you can't do it." I came out okay. I learned a lot from her.

Later on, we had after-school programs that would focus on what you really had to 'touch up' on or what you actually couldn't do. It was more like a private thing, rather than letting the whole school know that you couldn't read or you had problems seeing. There were a lot of us in the '40s and '50s who actually couldn't read, or they could read but they'd read backwards. I had a friend who instead of reading left to right, she would read the other way. That was how her brain worked, so she couldn't understand what she read.

That's why they would call people "dummies." Today it would be called bullying, but back then we just thought they were mean. You'd have to stand in the corner with a

dunce hat on if you were mean to a kid. They actually did that in those days. Or they'd put you out in the hall. You'd have to stick out your hands and they'd whack your hands with a flexible whip, like a tree branch or something. Then they'd put them in cold water. It was horrible. I know from first hand. My parents went along with it! They'd say, "Oh, you had a rough time today! I see you can't wash the dishes." And I'd say, "Yeah, because it's still hurting." And, that was it, I realized that I can't do this anymore, or I'll never be able to write.

For fun I would jump rope. All of us children would play on the streets. Our hangout spot was in front of the apartment door. My parents were strict, but I paid them no mind — I was always getting in trouble.

I was a social butterfly when I was young! I had a whole lot of best friends. My good friends were Barbara and Bill. I met my friend June when I was nine years old, and we are still best friends. We get together all the time and talk about old times. We are the same age — born the same year but different months. June lived with us one time when we lived in the projects. When we were teenagers we had to move there because they were tearing down our building.

My parents always knew I was different than the average kid because the other kids played doll babies and I didn't. It's not that I didn't like it — I did! But sometimes it was just boring to me, especially because the doll babies were all hard. C'mon now! We had baby doll strollers too, but they were cheesy and were made very badly.

I went to camp every summer until I was thirteen years old. My siblings and I would stay for the whole eight weeks from the beginning of July and we would come home at the end of August. We were allowed to come home once a month in July and August if our parents would come and get us, but my mother and father had no car, so guess what? We

used to write to each other. I'd write my mother and she'd write back. It's not like we missed each other because we were all at the same place, but when we got home we did appreciate our parents more.

I did so many things that were scary when I was young. The scariest thing that ever happened to me was one time, years ago, at the Boston Common. The Frog Pond used to be an area that was full of water and it was not clean. It was full of ducks and god knows what else! We were with this older guy from the neighborhood that we used to go hiking with. It was so hot that day that they said, "We're going to take the kids and throw them all in the water!" Well, I couldn't swim! So they said, "If you drown, we will come and help you." I didn't know how deep it was, but I found myself sinking all the way down to the bottom. I said to myself, "Not today," so when I hit the bottom, I pushed myself up, and did the doggy paddle all the way to the shore and got out. I couldn't wait until I got home to tell my mother about it.

We used to go to a big swimming pool at Charles St. in Cambridge near the Museum of Science. We used to walk all the way there from Mayo Street. It's still there from what I understand. It was an inside pool right next to the Charles River, and we used to go for free. By that time, I knew how to swim.

I enjoyed everything at that age, especially the movies. Whatever was out there, I enjoyed. I loved the block party dances we used have in the street. Everybody would meet up on the streets. There would be food, and we would dance half of the night away. The police officers would be there, too. We had a big record player that we would wind up and put on the thirty-three rpm records. We would play that music all night — it was a lot of fun.

My mother always told me, "Don't judge nobody on something they do until you do it because if you don't do it, you can't judge!"

I would ask her, “Do I have to do it?”

She said, “No, you don’t have to do it. I’m just telling you. People at different times of life do different things.” So, I don’t judge nobody. You can’t judge a book by its cover. I had to learn that the hard way.

I went to one year of high school. The reason why I left was because I was going to a secretarial school and they had a dress code. That’s what the Burke High School was years ago. You had to have a uniform. We wore loafers, stockings, a skirt, a jacket, a nice blouse, and a pocketbook or a purse—whatever you want to call it. But, I could not afford it. I wasn’t even working then. My mother could not afford it, so I dropped out because I didn’t want to keep wearing the same suit. I would just change my blouse. I guess the kids were never mean. They didn’t bother me about it, but I just felt like I should at least have two. It didn’t work out, so I left. I did one year there, and I’ve been working ever since.

We had gym, and our gym uniforms had the big bloomers! Then we had white shirts, white socks, and sneakers. We did a lot of exercises—that was gym, and it was the easy class. And, I liked cooking class, sewing class—you see, it was secretary school. So they just had typewriters—you know, stuff like that. I did pass the grade. I just left because I thought, “I am not gonna wear the same suit for four years!”

In those days, you couldn’t work. Not unless you had a mother and a father who was rich and had a store. So you couldn’t just apply for a job like McDonald’s or — matter-of-fact anything. If your family wasn’t wealthy, you didn’t get wealthy. So that’s what I’m trying to say. I knew a lot of wealthy kids—they worked for their parents. I babysat, but that didn’t make a lot of money. But it was my earned money. That was about it back then. I was always ready. My mother would say, “How you doing today? Was the family nice?”

I’d say, “Yes they were.”

“Nobody bothered you?” she’d ask.

“If somebody bothered me, you’d be the first one to know.”

She always told us to tell her rather than for her to find out some other way. Then she’d say, “Okay, you go back tomorrow.”

My hero as a teenager was my teacher, Miss Maggie. She always told me that I could do whatever I wanted to do if I just put my mind to it. She was one of the people who motivated and inspired me to go into military service. Becoming a soldier was my dream because I loved rules. My teacher said, “If that’s your trade, then go for it!” and I did. I didn’t make it but I guess that was for the best.

A lot of the people were very nice to me, but a lot of people were not as fortunate. There was a lot of stuff going on that nobody ever knew about until later. You see, I would get together with my friends a lot times and talk about the old days. You’d say, “You was what? You were? What? What?” Nobody ever knew about it if any of us were ever sexually molested, or beaten, or abused. I would almost fall on the floor when I actually found out there was a lot of it! It never happened to me, I was one of the fortunate ones. There were some sad stories, but they never said anything to anybody, and it just stayed in the family.

In those days, women were women but it really wasn’t recognized. I always felt that the boys came first because they did. My parents always made plans for the boys, but they never said, “Jackie, what do you want to do?” I told them what I wanted to do — I always wanted to be a soldier. They called it WACS (Women’s Army Corps) back then. Men were soldiers and women were WACS. I liked authority. There was structure to me. As a little kid if I wasn’t given rules, I would run all over you. Maybe that’s why I wanted to be a soldier. But my father never asked me what I liked. They set rules and that was it.

I never had a conflict, and I'll tell you why. I'm the kind of person that I'll say what I want to say, and I'll say it to your face, not to someone over there. Okay? If I don't like what you say, then I will say, "Why did you say that?" Most of the time, you really don't know why you said it. Or, you said it to be mean. In my family I was clean, I was dressed presentable, and I was always nice to everybody from little babies to elders. My mama taught us that. I mean I had conflicts, but they were squashed. Everybody was gossiping, and they're still gossiping. It never bothered me. I knew it wasn't true.

If I was fighting, I was fighting most of the time beside my brothers. Because back then things were like they still are today — very racial. The white kids would jump on us, and we had to fight for our lives, so that's what I did. While my brothers were beating on them, I was fighting them because I just couldn't just stand there — I had to do something! That's how I am with my three brothers. Shirley was a baby — she was too small. That's how it was on our block. If some new kids came on the block after us, we picked on them! That's just what kids do. It was mean but it wasn't like bullying. We just went out there, and said, "Oh, I don't like your sneakers." We'd kick your leg or step on your foot. Often times nobody won. After it was over, that was it. Later, if someone asked, "Remember that time you stepped on me," I would pretend that I didn't, but I did.

In my teenage years, I played more cards than any other time. We'd go to each other's houses to play. We'd have two or three different tables. Somebody would bring food, or cook food. It was a social time. We'd listen to old music, and tell lies. That was what we used to do like every other week, go to different houses or apartments.

At that age we did the same thing everybody else did. We used to drink. We had one special place and we'd always meet up there on the weekend. We would do our schoolwork and when we were finished, we would go home. There was nothing to do in

the cold winter anyhow. But in the summertime — HA — we had a lot of parties. We would get a can of Bings, or a can of something and sit in this place where we used to meet. At first it would just be us girls, then we'd said, "We should have some boys here," so we did. We had wine, and we would play our big 78 rpm records. It was all in fun. Nothing really bad happened, but the parents didn't know about it. It was just us teenagers. We'd say, "Oh, we're going to such and such a house. The mother will be there." The mother wasn't even in sight. I thought it was all in good fun.

I never ever wanted to get married. I've never been married and I've been happy. I was asked three times and I always said no. You know why? It was two jobs. It's still two jobs. You have your life and your husband's life. Then, if you have children you have your children's lives. That's just too much for me. I always like to be free. I do what I want to do when I'm ready to do it. I don't regret it. In those days the wife was somebody who cooked, who cared for the children, and tried not to spend too much money. I've worked ever since I was fifteen years old and I still work. That's who I am. I quit for a year and I almost went crazy. So I am working again.

I had my daughter when I was about twenty-three. Her name is Lenora Thomas Brown. I was a late bloomer. Most of my girlfriends — believe it or not — had children after they were sixteen. That was early! I wasn't very interested in the boys. They were alright to dance with, but there were so many horror stories. Everybody knew everybody, but I wasn't interested in them and they sure weren't interested in me. So mostly, I hung out with my brothers.

My daughter's father was the outside one. Ha, ha, ha. I said, "Oh, where'd he come from?" They said, "Oh, he just came from the state of Virginia." I said, "Who does he live with?" We were all young — I was about nineteen. So we visited his cousins, and I asked if he was married. They said no, and I was good to go. I never wanted to be

married, but that doesn't mean that I didn't love the man. I still do. I still date, every now and then. We would go to dinner or we'd go somewhere. Then, I'd take him home, and say, "We had a good time, right?" It's good to get out!

I like to go roller-skating, but people my age think, "I'll break my hip." I say, "How do you know that you'll break your hip?" So, me and my sister, Shirley go. We go for bicycle rides. Sometimes I'd go up there to Mattapan and I'd roller skate. We had a couple of parties there for the grandkids. We really had a good time.

My first job was when I was twenty-one. I was a sorter — not a factory sorter, it was a different thing. They had a big tower of bags, and we'd open up bags and organize it. We had gloves, masks, and everything to protect us. I did that for about three years.

The best job that I ever had was working for Bromley Heath Tenant Management Corporation (TMC.) It was one of my better jobs. You make good money. Sometimes you work seven days a week, but it paid off. I've lived here in this neighborhood for fifty years. That is where I worked up until 2007. I worked on the Heath Street side, and then the Bromley side.

I used to work in South Boston right near The Boston Globe Newspaper. I worked at a sports store called Girl Town. It was all American-made at first, and then the Chinese manufacturers took over. They were making everything in China, or Japan, or wherever. There were a lot of racial fights in the South Boston housing developments in the '50s. I lived over there in the Albany Street housing developments; there was a lot of racial tension, but nothing ever came of it. I remember some of them. I was out there, but I just passed by in a hurry.

I know there was a war. I remember the soldiers coming home from World War II. Some of my friends' fathers were soldiers, but my father was too old, so they wouldn't accept

him in the war. My brother served in the Korean War. I had some friends in there too.

My biggest adventure was the first time I went on a cruise. Leaving the United States of America, I went to at least six different islands. Barbados was my favorite one. If anybody ever gave me money, that would be my home away from home. I'd never live in Massachusetts. I also went to Jamaica and Mexico. That was for me, my biggest adventure. I didn't think that I'd like it, but it was so nice. Most of the time we stayed inside on the ship. Everything is going on inside. They had swimming pools and nightclubs with smoked windows. Or you could go out on the deck, stretch out, and enjoy yourself there.

We didn't really do anything on the boat, but we would be the first ones off the boat when we got into port. That's when you'd have a good time. If you knew somebody who lived on the island, they'd tell you the best spots that you normally wouldn't go to. We knew somebody in Barbados. We went up on a mountain, and they had a club up there. It blew my mind! They were just so nice. I went on an expedition on a pirate ship. I had a ball!

The water there is so salty that you cannot drown. That's why you never hear of anyone drowning on the island. You're not sinking, so you can't drown. I said, "Oooh, I can swim!" I relaxed and started floating. The water is nice and warm, but it is so heavy in salt. A lot of people go there just to be in that water.

Now I've been on three cruises. We went to New Orleans, and we went to Florida one time.

I've never thought about the idea of an inner home. I just live day to day. As a child, my siblings and I used to pray before we went to bed, and I would say to myself after the ritual prayers, "Tomorrow is another day." I would say to god, "I wish that I could make

another day. Make it better, correct my mistakes, or tell somebody I'm sorry." But I might also tell somebody I'm not sorry.

I'm a very free-hearted person. But don't step on my heart. Then you will have messed up! Life is good to me. No sense in me complaining. I've lost lots of friends. When you live long enough, that's what happens. But I'm healthy. I do more things than the average seventy-two year old lady does. I feel good about myself all the time. Even when I'm hurting, I feel good. Does that make sense? I'm old fashioned but I'm modern. I go to the beach and go to the museum. I go on and I go with the flow.