

## **Sadie Jackson** (Parker Street Apartments)

### **Interviewed by Shannon Hills and Nancy Cardona**

My name is Sadie Mae Jackson. I was born in Greensburg, Pennsylvania on November 18, 1926. I grew up in a little town called Library, PA. It was a coal mining town. Now they've changed the name to South Park. It's in the Pittsburgh area of Pennsylvania. Our little coal town was kind of like Mission Hill — houses all clustered together in a village. It was cold, just like the weather here in Boston.

I lived with my mother, Hattie Mae Warren Jacobs, and with my brothers and sister. I'm the oldest, then came my brother William, my sister Esther, and the youngest was my brother James Warren. There were two years between each of us. My mother loved us all, and she treated us all the same.

I didn't know my grandparents because my mother's mother died when she was just five years old. So my Uncle Jim and Aunt Julia raised her. My mother got married after I was born, so I had a different father than my brothers and sister. But my mother didn't tell me that until she was 93 years old. Then she said "*Your father's been walking around here. You know him..*" So I said, "Well, *who is he?*" But she still never told me who he was, so I didn't know my real father. My stepfather lived with us for a while, then he left us back in Pennsylvania. So my Uncle Jim and Aunt Julia helped my mother out with us, too.

From the time I was a little baby I had Asthma. I had it bad for fourteen years. I thought I wasn't even going to be here. My mother used to sit up night and day with me for a time. Some of my own kids had it, too, but they grew out of it. Back then the doctor came to the home and it was nicer. They were almost like a family member.

I loved school! Yes, I did have a favorite teacher. When I was in elementary school, Ms. Warren was the best. It's funny, that's my maiden name, too. She made sure that we learned, *and* that we were obedient, so she was both a good disciplinarian and a good teacher.

My school was small, but it was nice because we had a lot of programs. We had music and gym — gym where you'd go out and run around, do exercises, and play sports. When I was a little girl, I would always be singing, or I would dance in school productions. I also played the piano. The schools here now don't have much music or real physical education. In high school I played hockey, softball, and

basketball, and I learned archery. I played on the basketball team, and we would go and play games against other schools.

When I got home after school, first I did my homework, then we had other little chores we had to do after that. When my chores were all done, I could go out and play! My best friend was Margaret Austin. We always went places together.

I can remember going to the library, and I couldn't come back with just two books, we had to bring ten books! Because my mother never went to school, she didn't have the chance to become educated, but she wanted to be sure that her children were educated. So, that's where we got it, from reading. My favorite thing to do when I wasn't in school was to read — that was my thing! I don't remember the names of all the books, but I read a lot.

When I was a child, I played with kids in the neighborhood and my brothers and sister. We all played together shooting marbles, jumping rope, playing hopscotch and jacks — all those games. We would also "play house" and pretend we had our own home. When it rained, we mostly stayed indoors, but sometimes we would go outside to explore. We would watch the worms come up out of the ground. When we were kids, my brothers and sister and me, we all had to stick together, so we went on group outings.

We had little clubs as a way to make money. We sold different things like hot dogs or cookies and we had lemonade stands — things like that. We would do that so we could get ourselves some money to have a nice party. We didn't have to ask our mothers and fathers for any money, but we would invite them. Sometimes I had to look after my brothers and sister because I was the oldest. When my mother would go places, I would be in charge. My mother didn't work, she stayed at home, but nowadays, it takes two, or three to support a family.

The funniest thing that ever happened to me? Well, so many funny things happened, I can't begin to name them. But learning how to ride a bike and always falling off was funny. Until I really got the hang of it and figured out how to work the pedals, it was just funny. When you're learning something new, it's very hard, but later it seems so simple!

During my childhood, there was the radio. It was great because we learned to visualize and use our imaginations. You had to put things together with radio stories. Sometimes we would listen to shows like *Stella Dallas*. Then every Monday night in our little community, we would all be together laying on the floor listening to *The Shadow*. It was fun. Radio was better at stimulating the

imagination. Television and computers do too much for children today. They don't get a chance to be as creative because everything is done for them.

Yes, my neighborhood was racially mixed. We all mingled together. We played back and forth at each other's houses, and stayed at each others houses and all that. We went to church together. It was nice, not like it is today. All of the parents looked after each other's kids, and they had the right to discipline you, too. But now parents feel like "*no one better say something to my child!*" Remember the Bible says "spare not the rod to spoil the child." My mother spanked me, and I'm here. There has to be a balance so kids can learn.

When I was a teenager we walked everywhere. There was no bus, so we had to walk five miles to get to the swimming pool. Yes, my mother was strict, even when I was in high school. That's what keeps you in line. We had to be home before 11 o'clock, or we would have been out until all hours of the night! I got in trouble when I didn't listen to my parents. One time I went to a party and I didn't come home when I was suppose to, and we got punished by being spanked with a switch (branch) right off the tree! Our mothers didn't spare the rod, and it hurt. So we didn't get into too much mischief after we got that once or twice! Now, my kids say to me, "*You were a strict mother, but look how your kids turned out.*"

Our life was like camp when we were coming up. We became experienced with animals and the earth. There were country fairs, things like that, and we learned a lot from all that. They don't have that any more. We use to get up early in the morning to go pick blackberries, and we would put on our boots so we wouldn't get bit by a snake. We'd pick apples and peaches, then we'd take them home and have to peel them so my mother could can them. In our cellar there was a space where she put all of those canned fruits and vegetables, so she didn't have to go to the store to buy them. I helped my mother in the garden, too. I liked watching our fruit and vegetables come up and grow. When I lived here at 10 Bickford St. we had a garden. I grew cabbage — big heads of cabbage — and tomatoes, string beans. I liked having a garden.

My first date? Well, we would go places in groups, never alone. My girlfriend Margaret and me would get all of the boys. The other girls use to complain! When I graduated from high school, I went to work. At that time, there wasn't anything else to do. Our families could not afford college, so you had to be more or less on your own. It was hard. You had to make ends meet, and do things by yourself. When I was your age, my dream was to be rich. Nothing's impossible, but it didn't happen. I just hoped that I could get a job so I could help my mother more financially.

I met my husband at a party. He was in the Army Reserve. His name was Arthur Joseph Jackson, and he was a Staff Sergeant in the Army. We went together for about a year, then we got married. I was twenty one years old. After we got married, we lived with his mother; a lot of people did that in those days. When I had my first child, the pregnancy made me really ill. Then, when my daughter was born, they injured her at birth. She was born with Cerebral Palsy, and she only lived for three years. I went a few years with no children. Then, I moved to Boston with my husband in 1946, and I started having children every year, so I had seven more children.

I've lived here in this development for almost 45 years. In 1955 I got a job at Raytheon working in electrical engineering making 5U4 tubes. That was on Chapel St. in Newton. Wow, how did I remember all of this? So I worked while I raised my kids— I had to! I worked from 5:00 to 11:00 PM. I worked there for seven years, but then I had to quit because I had no baby-sitter. My kids were getting sick. So I would come home at night and I would end up taking them to Boston City Hospital. I had this lady doctor, and she would say "*You work?*" She would never tell me to quit, but she just looked at me. I had to work! I didn't want welfare, and \$38 dollars a month couldn't take care of 8 people even if I did want it. Sometimes I worked three jobs.

In the 1960's my kids were growing up and I was still working, and I was just trying to keep them busy. So they were in the Pioneer Girls Club and went to the Boys and Girls Club. They were into camping so they would learn some things like I learned when I was growing up.

My kids? Well, Jackie, she's deceased. Then comes Arthur, my son, he's the oldest now. Then, next was Patricia, she's deceased, too. Then there's Valerie, Sidelle, Nidra, Doris, and Pam. One of my girls is a social worker, and another one worked for Northwest Airlines. Another one works for Southern Bell in Georgia, so they're all doing well. Even if you don't get a college degree, you can get a skill. Look at me, look at where I came from! Sometimes it doesn't take college, but it definitely takes common sense.

My kids all went to school here in Boston. They went to Technical High, Girls High, Jamaica Plain High, and English High. I volunteered at Jamaica Plain High in 1968 doing security. Some boy had tried to set the school on fire, so they called me up because I had always told them that if they needed any help they could call on me. So I started volunteering, then they hired me as a security guard. After they saw that I could handle all of those big high school students, they put me in the

classroom. In 1971 I ended up working at the Wyman School, then I went to the John F. Kennedy School. And, since I had the experience in knowing how to handle the teenagers, they moved me to Jamaica Plain High. Then they changed that into English High. Later, I went to Madison Park High, but I didn't really like it there because I was always getting lost! So somehow I got back into English High, and the people at Madison Park said, "*We lost a good lady, a good worker.*" But, they couldn't keep me.

I put twenty nine years in the Boston Public Schools. It would have been 30 years, but I hurt my back handling one of those little kids at English High School. They brought this little girl in to me and she was very ill. They didn't expect her to live long, so they put her with me, and that little girl lived. They weren't expecting that, so nurses and doctors came over from Martha Eliot and Children's Hospital so see who it was that was working with that child. When I got injured and couldn't go, she said "*Mrs. Jackson, they don't treat me the way you treated me. I just sit there all day and I don't do nothing. When I was with you, you kept me busy, and you worked with me and you played with me. Now I don't do nothing. When are you coming back?*" Then later, she died.

Sometimes when I go out to these big stores, or to the super market, people will come up to me and say, "*You were my teacher!*" Sometimes they've got gray hair or bald heads, so I don't remember them. One time I had a man come up to me at the Stop and Shop. He's a minister and he lives in Ohio now. But he came up to me and he said "*Ms. Jackson, I want to give thanks to you because I wouldn't be the young man I am today if it was not for you. I'll never forget you as long as I live.*" Another time I went to Kentucky Fried Chicken, and this boy was staring at me. I said to myself, "*Oh, my, what's wrong. Do I have something on my clothes?*" Then he said to me, "*It's my old young-looking teacher. You taught me to read! Hi Ms. Jackson!*" So, I left a good legacy.

I had so many jobs. During the summer months when school was out, I worked for the Family Services of Greater Boston, and I cleaned offices too. I was always having to work at something. But the best job I ever had was working with children. I liked that they would listen to me. If you give respect, you get respect.

Yes, I drive. But I didn't learn to drive until I was 56 years old. I learned in the driver education course at Jamaica Plain High with the students. One of the other teachers said, "*Sadie, let's try this Driver's Ed. course.*" And I said, "*No, I'm not getting into that.*" And she said "*You can't lose nothing!*" So I did!

I think my biggest adventure is just traveling. I've been on cruises, and I loved that. I've been to Bermuda and the Bahamas. It's fun, and you can even play Bingo on the ship. What makes me happy now is just to be able to be by myself and do what I want. I love being retired. My greatest accomplishment was definitely raising seven kids by myself. That wasn't easy, but I did it. And now I'm happy that I can relax and travel and enjoy the rest of my life!

The person I most admired was my mother. She was the best friend I ever had. And now, my best friends would probably include Katie Green, and Julia Martin and quite a few others. I think the best words of wisdom I could offer young people would just be to learn to cope — to get along with people. That's an such important thing to know how to do to have a good life.