

Mildred Upshaw (Farnsworth House)

Interviewed by André Hankerson and Shaniqua Osgood (2002)

My name is Mildred Upshaw. My nickname is 'Upie.' I got that because my husband was in the service, and everyone was always called by their last name. My name is Upshaw, so somebody cut it short and called me 'Upie'. I was born in February ... I'm not telling you what year, but it was around the time of the Depression. I was from a very poor family, so it didn't make that much difference. We were already poor!

I was born in Providence, Rhode Island. Then I came to Boston when I was seven years old. I lived in Roxbury on a street called Oakburn Avenue. We lived on a small street, and we just had a lot fun. It wasn't quiet, it was a nice noisy street. It was — as you kids say — the bomb! It was a multi-racial neighborhood where everyone got along with everyone. And it produced some very successful people.

I grew up in a big family. There was my mother and father and then there were ten kids. I was the youngest. I had seven sisters and two brothers. After school we had to come home and do our homework and do our chores. And if you got that all done, you were allowed to go out and play until it got dark.

We were poor, but we made our own fun. We use to go ice skating in Columbus Ball Park ... and chopped wood to keep the fires going. We use to do a lot of sledding down the hills. And we just did a lot of things that the kids don't do today to have fun!

We use to walk everywhere. I went to the Boston Public Schools. I went to the William Bacon School to the third grade, then I went to the Dillaway School through sixth grade. From the seventh to the ninth grades I went to the James P. Timilty School, and then I graduated from Roxbury Memorial High School.

When I was a teenager, my favorite thing was to hang out ... just like you like to do today. My parents were strict, but even though we weren't allowed to, we use to sneak out. Our favorite thing to do on Friday night was to go to the Robert Gould Shaw House for dances. That was the highlight of the weekend. I hung around with friends from my neighborhood and friends that I went to school with. By the time we were 16, we would hang out all weekend long — as much as we could.

My favorite seasons are Fall and Spring because the weather is warm, but not too warm, and it's not cold. And I do not like the cold! I don't like summer because it's too hot ... and winter is too cold.

I like all kinds of music — gospel, rock and roll, all except for bebop, which you can't understand. I use to play the piano ... not now, though. I liked to dance ... all kinds of dance. And I still dance when I can.

I have a cat named MooMoo and a fish named Shakespeare. Right now, since I've been on oxygen, I don't have a real hobby. In past times, I use to do volunteer work

with the elderly, but I can't now. In my free time, I like to shop and go to restaurants — eat! I do belong to a group, but we don't play games or cards, we do charitable work. When I was a child we were poor, so we did a lot of things together, we played together, and we all shared everything. I don't think there's anything outstanding about being poor ... I'm just glad that I'm not as poor now as I was then. What's important to me are my family and friends. I think of myself as caring and a giving person, a church-going person, who will help others out when they need it.