

Novak Digital Interview Collection: Detroit Migration Series

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT— LENOLIA GADDY

Interviewee: LENOLIA GADDY
(Migrated to Detroit in the early 1930's.)

Interviewer: Sherry McClendon
Interview Date: March 6, 2014
Location: Ms. Gaddy's home in Detroit, MI
Tape No.: 03.06.14-LG (audio digital file)
(Approximate total length 86 minutes)
Transcription by Nathan Katzin

Summary: Migration to Detroit: Lenolia "Na-Na" Gaddy migrated to Detroit as a young girl. She recounts her life from her migration from Armory, Mississippi and the racial tension known there to the booming city of Detroit where she experienced a different lifestyle. She lived through two historical points in Detroit's history and gave accounts of both the 1943 Race Riot and the Detroit Riot of 1967. Ms. Gaddy has resided in Detroit for over 80 years.

Subject
Headings: Mississippi, Detroit riot 1943, Detroit riot 1967
Comments: Italicized text is interviewer.

TRANSCRIPT

Note: Counter index corresponds to track times when loaded into iTunes.

0:00

Interviewer: Good afternoon. So today we're here to do an interview of the oral history on migration to Detroit. And today I'm interviewing Ms. Lenolia Gaddy. And we've already discussed the informed consent, and I told you what the interview was about and you did give me your permission to interview you. So the name of the interviewee is, interviewer is Sherry McClendon. The name of the interviewee is Lenolia Na Na Gaddy. Today is March 6th, 2014. The place is in the home of Lenolia Gaddy, which is located in Detroit, Michigan. And the purpose of this interview is to discuss your migration to Detroit and also to enhance my interviewing skills. Do I have your permission for this audio interview?

Yes, you do.

Interviewer: Thank you. So first of all I'd like to thank you for participating in my interview, and I'd like to ask you when and where were you born?

Amory Mississippi. It's A-m-o-r-y.

Interviewer: Okay, when was your birthday? What year were you born in?

May 8th, 1921.

Interviewer: So, were both your parents born in Mississippi? Where are your parents from?

As far as I know, yes.

Interviewer: They both were born there.

Mmhmm.

Interviewer: So you have this nickname of Na Na. Now some people call you that whether they're related to you or not. Everybody calls you Na Na, or aunt Na Na. Where did that nickname come from?

It's a long story. They come back from the beginning of my children, when they were little. They was trying to call me momma, and they would say, it would go into Na Na.

Interviewer: Okay, so your children started that nickname of Na Na.

And everybody

Interviewer: Picked up on it.

Picked it up.

Interviewer: Okay. So you were born in Amory, Mississippi in 1921. And far as you know both of your parents were born there.

Yes.

Interviewer: Did you know anything about your grandparents? Did they come from Mississippi as well?

I don't know. They were both. I knew them, vaguely knew them.

Interviewer: Okay. Your grandmother and grandfather. Can you tell me anything about your grandmother?

Repeat?

Interviewer: Can you tell me anything about your grandmother Susie?

Oh yes. I had two grandmothers and two grandfathers. My mother's and my father's, and I knew them all.

Interviewer: Okay.

And my mother's grandmother, my mother's mother, my grandmother, and she took me as a pet.

Interviewer: (laughter) Okay.

And, we got along real good. I remember my father's mother, she was, I don't know, a little on the sour side. She may not have been, but the way I saw it.

Interviewer: So when did you come to Detroit? Did you come as a child? Did you come as an adult?

I wish I could remember the year. I came, I was a teenager. Because I went to Ohio, Springfield, Ohio, to live with my aunt.

Interviewer: Okay.

She was going to take me and keep, raise me. Her husband got sick and went to the hospital, and he never did come back. He passed. Then my aunt in Ohio called her sister, which was here, living in Detroit. And her sister said, "Come on over and bring Lenolia on too." Said, "Y'all come on and live with me." And I've been here ever since.

Interviewer: Alright. So how long were you in Ohio? Were you there long?

Not a very long time. I would say less than a year.

Interviewer: Oh okay. So you came from Mississippi, to Ohio, to Detroit.

Right, right.

Interviewer: Okay, so, do you remember, so going back to your grandmother Susie. Can you tell me anything about her or how it was growing up during that time?

Susie. Now, I could tell more about her than any of the rest. Because she lived, when we was little, she lived with us. That's my mother's mother. And, she was the sweetest lady. She was just. You know, she had a lot of trouble out of me when she got ready to comb my hair, because I had long thick hair and a tender head. And she had to run me down. [6:15?] She had to run me down, to catch me to comb my hair. But she would take us in her, it wasn't apartment, it was a part of the house. The children, she would take us in at

night and tell us old stories, fairy tales. But- And we would just love it. But it would scare us. You know. We'd be afraid to go back home for awhile. But she really was nice. Now when she passed, I was here. I didn't know, I didn't go back to see her. But I knew about her passing.

Interviewer: How old were you then? Were you grown? Were you grown when she passed?

No.

Interviewer: Oh you were still a teenager.

I was still, cause...When she passed, they told me about it, and I could have went back, but I didn't.

Interviewer: You stayed with the aunt.

Mmmhm.

7:41

Interviewer: Okay. So Susie, can you give me any information about Susie. I understand that she was mixed or bi-racial. Your grandmother Susie. Was her father a white man?

Yes, she- her father was a doctor in Amory. Doctor Burdine and he was Caucasian.

Interviewer: So did you know if she had any, did she mention anything about, do you remember anything about any race relations or did she have any difficulties as far as prejudice or anything like that during that time.

It was really going on, but us thin lipped children, we didn't get much of it. But her husband, Susie's husband, he was found dead on the side of the road way out in the country. Far as I know they never did find out what happened. They said- rumors was going but they never did find out what had...

Interviewer: Happened to him.

Uh huh. I remember him good. I have a (?) [9:20] to remember it by now. My mother kept it and brought it.

Interviewer: Okay, brought it back here.

So did all your family wind up back here eventually? Because you came with one of your aunts as a teenager.

Right.

Interviewer: I know a lot of your siblings were here in Detroit. So did everybody?

Nobody. But just my aunt. She was married. And she was working and her husband was working. He worked at Ford's and she worked at Chryslers. She was one of the first Chrysler women, one of the group, in a group. And we came and just made ourselves at home and just went on living. My aunt decided that I should go get back in school. So she took me to a night school at Cass tech, we went to Cass Tech. She went to night school with me and she was taking classes. And we just enjoyed it. And neither one of us was working. But we was getting along. And, then, when I got to be, seventeen I believe. I started to work. My auntie got me a job, and I started to work. Making my own money and everything and oh my goodness. You know my sister Lovie was in college at that time back in Mississippi and I was sending her, helping her through you know.

11:30

Interviewer: Okay.

It went to your mother.

Interviewer: My grandmother.

Your grandmother, yeah. And one year I sent her a coat. And that coat was the talk of the town. Like she was rich or something. And believe it or not, it only, I went down.

They had a clothing store downtown they called Askin's. And I went and put it in the layaway and it was a dollar down and a dollar a week. And I would enjoy skipping down getting the streetcar there, going down to pay that dollar a week, downtown and back. And when that coat got to her, it was something else, she loved it.

Interviewer: So where were you working at then?

Well she got, it was close to where we lived. The place of it was Reliable Linen Service.

Interviewer: Okay.

And I was separating and counting and separating linen. And, I worked there until I got married.

Interviewer: Oh okay. I see. Now when was that? You remember what year that was when you got married?

Hmm?

Interviewer: What year did you get married? Do you remember that?

I got married in nineteen...I got the license, nineteen um, what year was that? Oh, I know, nineteen forty, forty one, forty one. Because Bobby was born right after the, the year after.

Interviewer: Okay. So how many children did you have?

Three. I had Bobby, Norman, Jackie. One boy and two girls.

Interviewer: And they're all here in Detroit as well.

Yes, they were all born here. Raised here. And Bobby went to, he went in, chose to go in service at a young age that was going big then, when he was young. I think he was about twenty and he made a career in the service.

Interviewer: So eventually, down through the years, all of your family, just about all of your family, all of your sisters and brothers.

Including my mother.

Interviewer: Including your mother. Eventually everybody winds up in Detroit.

Yes about all but one. Now Dean, that was my baby brother. He didn't, he came, all of 'em have been here. Dean, it's a long story. He was in college for ministry. And when he came out, he had a scholarship rather. That was the main thing, one thing that helped him there. And when he got out he just went up like a balloon. Going from one step to another, higher and higher and higher. And he got to the place where they let him just take over you know. And he didn't, I don't know, he didn't even desire to come I guess. He married there. He's passed away now. And the kids, he had a wife and children, they still there. Some of the children, there, some is, you know, out, other places.

Interviewer: Okay, okay. So how did everyone else besides Dean. They just came one by one to Detroit? How did everybody else wind up here?

Oh yes, now, your mother, she was the first one came.

Interviewer: Lovie, grandma Lovie.

Yeah. And she came right after I got married, in the same year really. And she came, and we was glad to see her. She lived, when we got married she lived with me. We would do things together and go and, you know, enjoy one another. And the rest, now after she came, the rest just fell in line, I guess one by one, and start coming until they all were here. But they didn't have too much trouble getting work. They got jobs. Yes sir. Those was good old days. (laughs)

Interviewer: Good old days. So, at one point Grandma Lovie lived with you. And I know Joyce and Bobby, they're really tight now. How were they as children?

They just switched around cause Joyce, Leon was her first child, and Bobby was my first. Them both being boys, they were so tight together. I just thought maybe, I said, even when they grow up, they were gonna be so tight they won't, probably be looking at one another's girlfriends. Oh, they were so tight. And Leon's dad, Larry, he would take up a lot of time with him. And I remember every time that he come in, he'd be looking for him. He'd throw 'em up in the air and catch 'em. And they enjoyed that, but I was so afraid, didn't nothing happen. Joyce, you know she lived with Mrs. Williams.

Interviewer: Nanny.

Uh huh.

Interviewer: Mmhmm.

And they lived the second door from where we lived.

18:49

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

And she was always the cutest thing. I have a picture of her now. You wouldn't- I'm going to get it together one day and give it to you. Oh, she was so cute growing up. And she was always on the, I call it, (?) [19:03] side. Oh she wouldn't, anything didn't go with her. Larry her father called her muffin. She was pretty, well, you know, Mrs. Williams raised her mostly but we was close to her. So, she came up.

Interviewer: So um, was it, I guess was it common for I guess relatives to take the other relatives children that needed help back then?

Oh yes. Yes. That's how I got here. She needed some help, and my aunt needed help. It was very common for one to go and live with the relatives, you know, at that time. It wasn't like giving a child away.

Interviewer: Okay, I see.

It was more like being a help. Because the aunt I went to didn't have no children. Mrs. William, she needed help when your mother went there. And she was young too and she went to live with her.

Interviewer: So, now everybody's in Detroit, you all are grown. Everybody's here except for Dean.

Right.

Interviewer: So he was the only relative left or your only sibling left down there. Were there still other relatives?

He was the onlyest one left.

Interviewer: Were there other relatives still there?

I don't know anybody else. But, oh, we have a cousin, Billy, and he's still in Mississippi- he's married, he's married, and he calls every so often. It's my mother's brother's child. And he said, "Man, you are the only ones left." He always say that. He's afraid of flying. He said he won't get on nobody's airplane. But he's elderly now too. Cheryl, she was the same, they was the same, born in the same year, and one month apart. So, he's still living there.

Interviewer: So has he ever been here, or he hasn't? Has he ever been here?

Oh yes, many times. He came when my mother passed, last time he was here.

Interviewer: And when did momma Fannie pass?

She passed in 1998, July the 4th.

Interviewer: And how old was she?

And she was one hundred years, four months, and two days.

Interviewer: Wow.

She was born in 1898. She passed in 1998.

Mmm.

Interviewer: Okay. So do you have any, like information about your father's side? You know a lot about your mother's side.

I know more about my mother's side because, but I did know more about my father's mother, his father. I remember them, but not much closeness. I remember she used to live away from where we lived at. And she's the only one I know could make teacakes. Oh she'd make the! And we would go to her house and she would have them sitting up on the, just stacked up, and we'd be so glad to see them. She made the best teacakes, and nobody got the recipe to it. And now....we have to take what we get.

Interviewer: So you're known for your cooking. So maybe that's where you get it from, your other grandmother.

I guess I got that from my mother. My mother was a cook. She was a cook when I left there really, and she cooked at a boarding house. Oh they loved it, they loved her cooking. She made the best dinner rolls anybody. And she would cook for the boarders where she worked at. She was one of the pastry cooks. I remember when, now this, I was really small then. Going to the house where she cooked at, and there was another lady that was a pastry cook. So, the lady that they worked for, oh she was real large. She had a jar of peanut butter, eating, just eating out it with a spoon. And I didn't, I thought that was so strange, you know, just being kids.

25:10

Interviewer: So mamma Fannie was good with making these rolls, because she was a cook.

Oh yes, and even after she got here she continued to make em, make rolls, was known for her good rolls. And I got into cooking and I ended up being a cook.

Interviewer: Oh, ok.

I worked at the place eleven years and four months. Where I worked. And when I left there, that's when I came in this home. To help with the seniors. Stick near the seniors.

Interviewer: So mama Fannie was a cook. You were a cook.

Yeah.

Interviewer: That's where you get the peach cobbler from. Cause everybody loves, your peach cobbler. That's-

That's what- they know about my peach cobblers. (laughter)

Interviewer: Mmmhm.

But I like, apple is my favorite, so I like apple the best. But I cook most anything. When I went to get an interview for my cooking, for my job, they asked me, "What kind of food do you, what do you cook?" You know, "Food do you cook?" I said, "I cook," I didn't cook their type of food. "I said, "I cook soul food." At that time they was calling it soul food. And she said, "What's wrong with soul food." And before I left that place, they were eating soul food and loving it. (laughter)

Interviewer: Okay.

(laughter) Oh yeah, they love that soul food. So... Came on passed down the line.

Interviewer: Mmmhm, right. So when you worked at that job. Were you working there when you were married, when the kids were smaller? When you worked there, were you married then, working? I know you said you worked doing the linen when you got married. So did you do that after that?

Oh that was after, after I was married. Because my husband also went in service. He was in- he wasn't, he didn't make a career, but he was in there for awhile. Last time they

built those houses, temporarily houses. You may have heard tell of for the servicemens' wives and families, and I was in one of those. Kids was just little then.

Interviewer: Where were you then? Were you still here?

On eight mile road. On Roselawn near eight mile. That's where I lived at that time. And we lived there for ten years.

Interviewer: So that's probably where Bobby got that initiative to go into the service too. So that's probably why Bobby went into the service too?

Uh huh.

Interviewer: Because of his dad.

I don't know but- He really wanted to go. Because after he graduated. After he graduated from high school he, he didn't want to get a job. You know, he didn't want to. And since he did get a job working in a hospital and he didn't like it. He just made his mind up. I guess he just wanted to go.... he went. He really loved it. He stayed on all the way.

Interviewer: Yeah. Maybe that was in his blood.

Probably. Mmhmm.

29:24

Interviewer: Mmhmm. Yes. So have you been back to Mississippi? Since leaving have you been back to Mississippi?

Who?

Interviewer: You, at all, since leaving there? Have you ever gone back to visit?

I went back maybe a couple of times. One time for sure when I was young. But, my dad, he was a schoolteacher at the school [30:00] we went too. Most of us went to. And it was right there in Amory. Then it was little, you know, small place, but now it's still been really big now.

Interviewer: Same school?

Right.

I got a lot of...some memories, quite a few memories in Mississippi.

Interviewer: I know once before you said when you came here with your aunt, she was going to send you back to Mississippi and she asked you did you want to go back to Mississippi or come to Detroit?

Right, right, when her husband passed, they had big plans for me. She said her and her husband had said they was gonna, they had planned on getting, they was gonna send me to school, send me through school, send me to Wilberforce College. That's one of the big colleges in Springfield. And they, oh they was gonna do some much. And I don't know, I've never seen them, her husband. He passed, and that just changed plans. All the plans about for her. He left her pretty well off. She had properties and rental properties and... the home she lived in. She decided to come here she got a lawyer to take care of that business for her. All of it sold and everything.

Interviewer: Okay. So did she give you a choice to go back to Mississippi or come to Detroit and you chose Detroit?

They had to do like my husband did, they had ask permission you know, for me to come and stay from my parents. When I got ready to get married my husband wrote a letter to my parents in permission. He got it. So...yep.

Interviewer: So when your aunt, to ask you, your plan was to come to Ohio, so you went to Ohio.

Right, right.

Interviewer: Then he passed. I believe she gave you an option to go back to Detroit or Mississippi.

Right, right, right.

Interviewer: And you said Detroit, you wanted to go back to Detroit.

She asked did I want to go back, did I want to come home to Detroit and I chose here. I chose to come with her.

Interviewer: So why did you choose Detroit over Mississippi?

I don't know. I was like one of the children that liked to leave home and I guess explore, whatever. So, cause when I was there I was going nearby places, staying with relatives, going. So, when they asked for me, I was glad. (laughs) Just something about it, I just didn't, you know, like it too well. I didn't like it.

Interviewer: Down here.

Uh uh. I didn't really like it too well. I told her yes, I would rather come here with her. I know that they were working but I wasn't thinking about the living part. But my aunt, they took good care of me. She'd go to buy me clothes. Instead of buying one she'd buy two or three pieces at a time, the same thing. And she was very, you know, loose with her money, getting me stuff like. So....I came.

Interviewer: So when you all came to Detroit what did she do? Did she work when you all came to stay with her sister?

Now, her sister worked. And her sister's husband worked. Me and her, when we first got there, we'd go to school at night, then. We'd go to school at night. Through the day we'd just make ourselves comfortable, content.

Interviewer: So I know one time we talked before about you and all your siblings, and you outliving all your siblings. You all were born in Mississippi together, and you were the first one to come here, then followed by Grandma Lovie and everybody else. So you were the third or the fourth oldest.

Children, third.

Interviewer: You're the third oldest. So all of your other siblings are gone. They all passed away.

There were seven of us, and they all passed away. I'm the only one that's left.

Interviewer: So what are your feelings towards that. Do you feel any type of way about that?

I didn't know that elderly life could be so enjoyable. When you get elderly, it seems like more people just, people don't know you. I went to the grocery store, Kroger, you know, since she works here. She cashier now just took a liking to me. She went, after she found out my age. And a lot say they look like they mother. They just friend give, I don't be looking for it, you know, but they just. I said when you get old, you get more stuff, goodies. (laughs) Yes, you can get, bout get what you want. Not if you don't want too much. I like elderly age. I like getting up in the morning, getting my breakfast, going about doing what I need to do. And, if I want to do something- if I don't want to do it, you know, I don't have to do it. I just sit down. I enjoy it. I really do.

37:37

Interviewer: Do you have any fond memories of your siblings, when you were children or adults? Anything significant that stands out?

I remember, that Leddie was the oldest and when my parents would go away, she would be in charge. She had us, she had us under control. (laughter) And one day me and my brother, oldest brother, we was gonna not let her boss us around and make us do things. And, so we had evidently got together on it, but when she jumped us that day, we was

ready for her. And we took her down then. We took her on, just, you know. It didn't seem to help but, you know, it didn't help, but... We got by that day, because it was two on one, two against one. But she still was the boss. My parents would always leave her in charge and she would always make us know that "I'm in charge." (laughs) And we grew up together like that, but she ended up coming right to me when she got a chance. She was a, went to college down there for a school teacher, she went and taught school a little while. I guess she didn't like it. Then she came right here. Yes sir, she enjoyed it. I don't know, I guess none of 'em liked it very well. I was thinking maybe I was the only one.

Interviewer: In Mississippi?

Uh, huh, I don't have a lot of memories, fond memories. Because the old [40:00] people, the older people would tell things and the younger people would hear it. And it just didn't go too good.

Interviewer: So she followed- she came down, I almost said followed you, but she came down here when you first got married like when you were in your twenties. So that would make her probably like in her late twenties, when she came here, or her mid-twenties.

Uh huh. Because she was, she was just, out of college, and had taught school just awhile, long enough to find out that she didn't like it. And she took off and came. But see, that was in nineteen, right after I got married. I got married in forty-one, forty-one. She came right after that. And so, I didn't have long to, to, you know, be by myself. I was glad, you know, that she was there. I was so glad. We had all stayed together. Enjoyed one another.

Interviewer: So do you remember anything that was going on in that era, when she came around nineteen forty one? When everybody was coming to Detroit, do you remember what was going on in the city, during that era?

In Detroit.

Interviewer: Mmmhm.

All I remember, we was not old. We got in with our age group, together, and we would go places, you know. Movies, get together and have a lot of fun together having little parties, different things. But I couldn't get with her too much because I was married. We would all go together sometimes, have fun.

Interviewer: So then, how was the, I guess the atmosphere or what was going on socially then? Was there any like race issues. Do you remember anything? Riots, anything?

Oh yes. They had the first race riot, it had to be in the forties. Because Bobby was a baby, Leon was a baby. And, they got the news that somebody was at Belle Isle, came from Belle Isle and said, was riding down the street with a loudspeaker, telling everybody, "Hit the street." Saying a white man, white people just threw a colored person in the river. And stirring them up too. And people started hitting the street. That was the worst thing. Oh. We was, I remember it very well. We was in our home, and we went to the door and looked out and white, colored was after the white, the blacks was after the white. They beat one white boy up right there close to the house, he was bloody. And then, it was just something to see really. They said, if people got killed, some of 'em was just too light a color. They was took for white. And oh boy, that, it looked like that went on so. And my aunt that I lived with, she called, and she said, "Y'all better come over here." She said, "They not fighting like that over here." So my uncle took me, took the kids and we went, all went over to my aunt's house. Got over there and they start, she lived close to commercial places. Clothing stores. They went to breaking those big glass windows and everything. It was, it was. Something to see. I remember Larry, coming,

telling my husband. Said, "Man, we better go up here. There's broke glass. Grocery stores throwing out hams and stuff. Telling people to come in." He said, "M'am," Larry said, "M'am, we better go up here get our baby some milk." You know milk was the main thing they would think of. That we better go and get the baby some milk. Bobby was the baby and Leon was the baby. That's when that first race riot was.

Interviewer: Race riot.

That was the race riot at that time. It was exciting. Because you didn't know what, you gonna be in it, get destroyed in it or not.

Interviewer: Right.

45:41

All up and down the street. In people's yards. Everywhere. I was glad...and when it was over, that's when the bad parts come. No food. The stores had done got ripped off. And no food or nothing. People had done got what they wanted to though. But I was afraid for 'em to go up there and get the stuff. They said the grocery store on the corner, but they were just throwing hams and stuff out the window. Telling people come get it. Well that was one thing that I was in heavy. A memory, you know, go a long ways.

Interviewer: So that was in the early forties.

Uh huh. Early forties. The kids was too little to even remember. Bobby and Leon, they were the first two.

Interviewer: So do you know what caused that?

Yeah, they said that-

Interviewer: The Guy- do you know why they took him to the (?) [47:00] and tried to- Well they found out it was false. Didn't nobody throw nobody in the river.

Interviewer: So it never happened.

But they found the people. We had heard that they had found the people that started it. And they prosecuted them. But they sure had Detroit tore up.

Interviewer: So did they know why they started that rumor.

They never did find out. It's, I heard that, they wanted, it was somebody they wanted, people said they wanted to steal, for to get, you know, things to change. But I never experienced too much racial here. Not really. Not at school, work, nothing. Very little.

Interviewer: Do you have any experience or memory from any prejudice or anything when you were little in Mississippi? Do you have any memory of any prejudice or anything like that when you were little in Mississippi?

No. I just remember, my dad, he had us all scared. He went to take a lady home that was with us, had been visiting with us. He went, and after he took her home, no, on his way taking her, he saw somebody, [oh], the way he told it it was scary, standing on side of the street, on the side of the road. And when he came back, standing in the same place, he looked like a human being. It was a scary story. And my father was, he wasn't too brave. You know he was kind of scary too. He would tell that, I could feel the hair standing up on my head almost. It was really something. But, I don't remember really too much fun we had in Mississippi. I don't remember that. And the older people would talk about things happened, but they would keep it under [50:00] cover like, and tell you, "Don't talk about that, don't talk about that." So we never did experience getting in no trouble, no big time trouble. We was afraid to talk about certain things.

Interviewer: So when the older people said, "Don't talk about that." Did you all know what they were talking about as children.

Uh huh. Yeah.

Interviewer: And what was that? If I could ask.

They beat, you know something, be done, happened. The blacks be done, like, this man, we know. He was in the service. He got out the service. Seemed like the whites wanted to beat him up or something. And he was the type wasn't gonna take nothing from nobody. And they got into with this man. This man got up, and they say he fought, fought for kill. And they say he probably left, left him dead already. You know. They just cleared him. They say since he came here, he had relatives, the man did, he had relatives here. And they came here. Somebody now has a picture. They went to Chicago and got a good lawyer. The man did. And he had got married. They went and got a good lawyer. A big time lawyer. And the lawyer cleared him. He could go, he could, even went back if he had a wanted to Mississippi. He cleared him, so, the man passed now, but he was clear when he passed. Cause see it wasn't a, it was a self-defense thing. And that lawyer got in it and worked it out. That was Smitty. These pen people only lived a block from where we lived.

Interviewer: So when he came out of the service. He was basically saying that he was harassed, or whatever, by the white people. And or attacked, and that he fought in self-defense.

Not here.

Interviewer: Right, in Mississippi.

Oh in Mississippi.

Interviewer: Right. So he fought in self-defense.

You would just hear things. You never would actually see or know. You would just hear, then you knew not to talk about it. You knew not to say nothing. I don't have no good memories from Mississippi, at all. Not too much, you know, just being with the family. And I remember, my grandfather, he was real sick, and I remember hearing him say, "Do y'all think I'm getting better? I'm gonna live, or not?" He was talking to his son, my dad. "Yes pop, you gonna live, you gonna live, you getting better." But I don't know if he passed away from that sickness or later on.

Interviewer: Okay. So you've never really experienced like prejudice or anything firsthand, that you all knew it was going on.

We didn't- knew it was there, it was going on. It was really going on. But we was well schooled, you know, being young. I remember one time we was in the midst of white people. The kids, you know, we was little, the kids was little, and one of the kids said no, to a white lady. And I remember, "Don't say no. Don't say no to me. You don't say no, you say yes m'am." Or yes, whatever. Now I remember that. We were just children, but we knew what to do. There's one thing, we took like, going to school, you know, just like a lesson. He said, my daddy said, "People alright, if you just stay in your place. Don't get- cross the line in a matter of speaking." But a lot of people ain't gonna stay in they place. Cause they- Smitty, he was out the army, hadn't been long got out the army when he got into it. And they say he was on his way when he stopped at an old lady's house and told her what trouble she was in. She tried to help him. She said, "Son, you get out of here quick as you can." Said, "Don't stop until you get away from here. They catch you they gonna hang you or something." But I never really experienced too much. Cause, if your people work for somebody, see they knew what was going on. And they would tell the children what to do, and how to, what to say, how not to get into. But we didn't get in no trouble. Long as I was there, didn't get into no big trouble. But we could have. It was going on. We just went around it.

56:57

Interviewer: So when you say you haven't experienced much, you didn't really experience it as a child, but you was aware of what was going on. Did you experience some here, since you come to Detroit? Or anything was not here?

Cause we had always heard, from all the people that lived here. That you was free when you come here. You could say yeah, naw. Hit a man upside the head if he hit you- what color. We always heard that everything was like that. And that's the way, I walked in to believing everything was right. We didn't see nothing then, back in those days, too much noteworthy. Because the place I worked was a Jewish place. And they had, and Jewish people was running it. The people, black and white, were in there together, you know and all. And, got along pretty good together. And Julius, he was a Jew that was my boss. And I just couldn't understand what he was be saying half the time. Lenolia, what are you up to? I guess he called me my name, all different names and everything. Even the girls that I worked with. I was the youngest one. My auntie got me the job there, cause she knew the place, about it.

Interviewer: Which place was this?

Where I got-

Interviewer: The linen?

That was here.

Interviewer: Mmmhm.

Uh huh. I didn't experience no prejudice, not at all. It was black and white worked there. We got along together. I didn't never see no fights or nothing, you know, until that race riot. That big riot came.

Interviewer: So when you were in Mississippi, you didn't really experience anything. But you said you had happy memories with your family, but other than that you couldn't, you can't remember anything happy about Mississippi.

Not drastic. Not bad.

Interviewer: Mmmhm.

I haven't experience nothing here either. Nothing real drastic.

Interviewer: Were you here for the, do you remember the riot that was around 1968? Do you remember the riot that was around 1968? When they had the-

Oh yes, oh yeah. I remember that one well because we was, we had moved and been to different places and all. We was in the same church we in now.

Interviewer: Okay, mmhm.

Our old church. We was there, cause, Elder Peterson hadn't been long come.

And he said, he said these people were breaking up and stealing. He said they was tearing down the place- burning, they was burning. He said it looked like they was gonna burn up Detroit. They came, I remember that particular day. Because we was driving, I was driving. We usually come around through the drive, but they had a big curb there. And when we went home, Elder Peterson said, "Y'all go home." Rather than stay at the church. And I ran over that big curb, I don't know if I did harm to the car or not. But we was getting on and aw we saw it. But we didn't get into no trouble. We didn't see nobody wanted to fight or nothing, to catch us. And we went in the house and stayed there. Yeah, I remember that well in '68.

Interviewer: And what was that riot about?

Now that, they said that wasn't really a race riot. It was a, Elder Peterson said that the people there wanted to steal. Somebody just wanted to steal and get what they wanted, you know. But I never really found out the cause of it. But, that was a kind of bad one too. But that time, somebody found a diamond ring over there around the church. They said he was just breaking in those jewelry pawn shops, and throwing stuff around and. It looked more like people wanted to steal, wanted to take stuff. Fed up with the way things was going. I never found out actually what caused that. But I was in it.

1:02:53

Interviewer: So you been here, basically about, I'm gonna guess about eighty years. Or somewhere close to that. In Detroit.

Close. You close. Close to that. Or more, cause I wasn't eighty. Yeah much more than-
Interviewer: More than that.

Eighty years, cause I was nothing like twenty when I came here. This what- fourteen, 2014.

Interviewer: Yep this is 2014. And so you came as a teenager from Mississippi to Ohio, to Detroit.

Correct.

Interviewer: Then all your family eventually followed you, All followed.

Interviewer: Except for Dean.

And my dad passed, I guess he would have followed too.

Interviewer: Oh, but he never came here.

He had, he had a stroke. I know I went back then. Cause I remember lying in the bed. And I got word to all of the children. And they got car, jumped in the car and said my brother was driving it, turning the curves and going, coming around through the mountains and all. They made it just before he passed. And when they all got there we all got round his bed. And somebody was telling him who all it was. Daddy, this is Fred, this is Lenolia. And he would say, "Ahhh,"but he knew what was going on. He knew what was going on. And after all the children. And this was part, strange part. And after all the children got round him, and told him all their names and all, he drew a deep breath, (breathes in) like relaxing. And that was the last, that was the last of him. And I said, I said, something, I made a remark. And somebody thought maybe I shouldn't have made it, I didn't make it out loud. But I said, that's all of him, that's the last. I was there, when I was working here, and I just went, took off all of a sudden. Because I was, way before, not way, two weeks before he died, before he passed. So he passed and all of us were there, got together and buried him. I got way out the next day, right away and got back. Yeah, looked like he was so relaxed, after all the kids.

Interviewer: Right.

Cause I think most all of them was here then but Dean too. I called Dean, he came. He didn't live the long ways, but he didn't live

Interviewer: Right there.

1:06:56

Close to 'em. He got the doctor, doctor pronounced him, that night. We started making arrangements. We started making the burial arrangements. And my mother, she was staying on there because they owned their own home. She wanted to stay. I don't know what she wanted to be in or not. But after that we found, asked her did she want to come, found out. And my other sister, Fannie, she drove for. She was in Florida. She drove from Florida to Mississippi. Picked up my mother and her belongings, what she wanted to bring. She knew she was coming. She had got settled. She loved it. She liked down there. She, George, my brother had been to the army and he brought her a new refrigerator, new set up, you know, new things in the house. She got rid of 'em all of 'em. And when she came, she came home, everybody being so cold here she didn't know about it. But she finally, she finally come around. She liked it.

Interviewer: So she came, eventually came and followed everybody else, after your father passed.

Mmmhm. And when she came here, like this church house. There was a church house two doors from here. And Elder, Elder Peterson was over, you know over, and he had

her, let her live in the church house. She wanted to be. You know, she, it was another lady. Her and Sister Falls [1:08:59]. Cause she came in the church in Mississippi, cause the church went there, started the church.

Interviewer: Who came in that church, Momma Fannie?

Yeah, she was in the church in Mississippi, the same church. And she went and she got used to it, you know. And Sister Falls, her and Sister Falls lived there, oh for years. Because everybody then was working and going on. But they was retired I guess. Didn't have to go to work.

Interviewer: So eventually everybody came from Mississippi, and winded up, some kind of way winded up in Detroit.[1:10:00]

1:10:04

Winded up in Detroit. And all of 'em that's not passed on is still here.

Interviewer: Right, that's here buried in Detroit.

Mmhmm. Uh huh.

Interviewer: Everybody else is still here.

They're still here.

Interviewer: So you were born in 1921. You said Momma Fannie was born in 1898.

Eighteen, eighteen.

Interviewer: Ninety-eight.

Ninety-eight.

Interviewer: So Grandma Susie was probably born in, probably like 1870 something.

Who?

Interviewer: Grandma Susie.

Ooh.

Interviewer: She probably was born, probably twenty or some years before that.

Grandma Susie was old when I was little. Yeah, she was old then. When I was little, she was an old lady. But she wasn't old like I am.

Interviewer: But elderly

In age.

Interviewer: So did Grandma Susie ever tell you any stories or anything, you know, there's like any slavery, any history of slavery in her family?

She just told fantasies. Oh my goodness. Something scare you. She never talked about slavery. But my grandma Susie and her husband, I don't know about my dad's side very much. I'm sure they would know something about slavery. They would know probably quite a bit about it. Because, um. Lemme see. We had an Auntie that lived right there too. Aunt Melissa, she was over a hundred. She was over a hundred years old. I know. I know that she could tell about it. She could tell a lot about it. Cause see, by her being a hundred back then, that wasn't too far from it. But, it was going on. And discrimination was going on too. But, we didn't get hung up in none of it. I put it, I don't know what some of our people, ancestors may have. But this generation didn't.

1:12:34

Interviewer: So do you think that might have something to do with why everybody came here? What was going on down there? Do you think what was going on down there might have had something to do with why your whole family winded up here?

It might have something to do with the rest of em, because I didn't like it. I wanted to get away from home. And, I, like my mother meant too. I used to pray. I used to pray and ask the lord, let me go first, cause I didn't want her to pass. But I like getting away too. Because when I got the chance to come I was ready, I was ready to come. It may have had something to do with the rest. But I've heard 'em say, that you couldn't get nowhere

there. You know could work all your life you wouldn't get nowhere. You couldn't prosper. Progress. I've heard that said, most older people. Yep.

Interviewer: Well it sounds like you had a good long life here.

Oh yes. Yes indeed.

Interviewer: Get a lot done and worked at various places. Linen place and the cooking place.

Oh yes.

Interviewer: Which you end up being great at, at the cooking.

Everybody knows you cakes and pies-

I put it in action.

Interviewer: Put it in action.

It just must be a, been a gift because I didn't go to school for it. Oh yeah, when I was going to Cass [14:28], night school, I did take a cooking class. But that didn't help me with my job I guess. It was the basics, giving us the basics of cooking. How to prepare your food. I remember telling me, like, you was gonna make porkchops, you would season them on both sides. Like put salt on one side and salt on the other. I was just used, you don't think, you put salt on one side. But they gave us the basics of it. That class I went to there. I got the card, a postcard now, when I stop, when I come from school. And my teacher sent a beautiful card, about how he wished I could continue. Had, continue and finish up. Yes, but, life has been good. All the way. You know, other side goes along with it. But this side outdo it. The good side. Yes.

Interviewer: Well again, Mrs. Lenolia, Na Na Gaddy. I would like to again thank you for the opportunity to interview you. And I would like to thank you for your time, and I really appreciate it.

You are so welcome. I'm glad. And Jackie was just so enthused. She was so glad. And how she said, "Now there's something that..."(coughs) I was just running off at the mouth.

Interviewer: Mhm. That's fine.

(laughter)Yeah she was so happy. She said, I gonna be retired pretty soon. She said, "I'm come'n and give you a hand."

1:16:57 (End of transcript)