

(INTERVIEW WITH N. MACK-LESTER 08/13/90)
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The Pittsburgh Courier was the largest weekly newspaper in America. It was Black owned. They had eleven branches throughout the United States, from coast to coast. In Detroit it was called the Detroit edition of the Pittsburgh Courier. At that time, it was the largest of all of their branches in the U.S. and the only one eventually headed by a woman. And I was the only woman.

John R. Williams was the editor of the Courier and he asked me to come and serve as his secretary. So, that's how I got my start with the Pittsburgh Courier. They said he had difficulty keeping a secretary. He had a new secretary every week. I said, "Well, he won't chase me away."

I got my break when he was out of town once and a big story broke and they needed someone to write that story. So, the Pittsburg office called and I told them that he was out of the city. They said, "You think you could write it?" I said, "Oh yes." So, I wrote the story.

I did go to Washington, DC once after that. I wasn't expected to write a story, I was just going as a guest of the President of the United States. And the reporter who was supposed to cover President Johnson's inauguration didn't show up and they called me in Washington and asked me, "You're the only one with credentials there, so, could you write the story for all of the papers throughout the United States?" So, I did the headline story for all eleven of the papers for that event. That was the inauguration of Lyndon Baines Johnson.

The people were complaining to the newspaper that the tests that they gave them were unrelated to the job that they were asked to do. That's how we'd find out, people would complain. Like you'd write to the editor or you'd contact the newspaper and tell them that you think that you're being mistreated and dealt with unfairly.

Federal Dept. Stores. They were giving difficult exams for the perspective employees. Exams that were way out of line. So we worked with them and got them to change their type of exams that they gave individuals because people were failing the exams but they really could succeed on the job.

In 1967, they closed the Pittsburg Courier Detroit office. There was a man at the MESC, who was a friend of one of the executives, one of the officers, out at the Ford Motor Company. He said, "I've got a lady that you ought to have on your staff because you don't have any Blacks." And they were trying to get them to hire a Black person because they'd never had a Black person work before for a Ford publication. And he said, "She was General Manager and Editor and she's a charming young lady." So, he said, "Send her out to see me. When can she come?" And he said, "Well, she's sitting here in my office right now, we were just talking and it was just a coincidence that you called at this time." And he said, "Ask her, can she come in tomorrow." I went in the next day and he said, "You know, we have five applicants for this opening." This was on a Friday. So, he said, "We'll let you know on

Monday as to the person we select for the position." And I wasn't dressed for the job because I was dressed to go out to a social function. I had on my fur coat and after five attire. So, when I walked in I apologized. I told him, "That was the only way I could accept your appointment is because I already had a previous commitment. I hope you'll accept me this way but I don't dress this way for the office." I said, "I always stress that my staff dress for the occasion and not over dress or underdress." And I showed him a scrapbook that I'd done for the YWCA, 'cause I served as their Public Relation's Chairman for nine years, and I wrote all the stories that were in there and I handed him that scrapbook and they looked at it and they said to me, "We're going to make our decision on Monday. We do appreciate your coming." And we just chatted awhile.

So, on Monday at 3:45pm they called me. They said, "We arrived at our decision." I said, "Oh, thank you so very much for calling that's very kind of you to keep your commitment to call me." "And we've decided that you're the lady that we'd like to have work for us."

Ford went on strike and I was the last hired and they as a settlement in their strike decided to close down all of their publications except for two. They had a lot of people with much more seniority than I had. And they explained this to me. They said, "We're not going to fire you but we just want to keep your name on our payroll and you don't have to

come to work but when there's an event going on where they need someone to represent the Ford Motor Co., we'd like you to attend, you'll still get your paycheck. And when Henry Ford returns to the country... he was out of the city... I'm sure he'll find something for you to do because, I know, he wouldn't want us to let you go."

When I got married I had the largest wedding that Detroit had ever had. I had twenty-four attendants. All velvet wedding.

I got married at Metropolitan Baptist Church. The Church held a thousand people and the people were lined up around down to the corner four deep in both directions. They couldn't get into the Church. Nobody believed everybody would come who was invited, but I guess they all did.

An all velvet wedding. A 15' train. I had a perfume shower. It lasted me from 1948 till twenty years ago. I stored it in the linen closet. You have to keep perfume in a dark cool place.