

(INTERVIEW WITH SECOND BAPTIST)
(VERSION 1.0 - REVISED DECEMBER 1991)

(Catherine Reid) I arrived in Detroit on the 3rd of July, 1923, as a youngster, with my mother and dad and my brother. During that time, it was difficult to find a place to stay, so we ended up on the East side where my dad had rented a room for us.

That was 4529 Hastings Street; it was near Forest, I believe. It was new to me, because I lived in a small town in the South. And hearing voices talking loud all during the night and early mornings. It frightened me.

My Dad wasn't satisfied so we moved over near Eastern Market. We lived on Russell Street. That was almost as bad. So finally, my Dad found a house on Binder. They were building new houses out there. And we lived near Nevada on Binder. Any time my Mother forgot some groceries, I had to walk from there to Davison to the market to get them. So I wanted to always remember everything so I wouldn't have to walk. About that time, my Dad was working at Ford's, out at Ford Rouge plant. And that meant he had to get up around two o'clock in the morning in order to get to Ford, because he had to walk to Davison to get the Baker streetcar. So finally, we moved to the west side, and I was a little bit happier over there.

At that time, I had visited all kinds of churches and I wasn't satisfied. So the people where we lived at that time, it was on Wabash - 1344 Wabash. So anyway, some of them belonged to Second Baptist, and I visited with them. I liked

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Second Baptist. I liked Reverend Bradby. He seemed to be warm, not like some of the ministers. And I finally asked my mother and dad if I could join. And they said, " yes," so I joined in March of 1924. And I've been a member ever since then.

Reverend Bradby was warm and he'd always come down and talk to the young people and start an argument among us and sit back and laugh.

Not to provoke, but start us to arguing, discussing something, something that was new, that was in the city, something that young people would know about. And then I had the opportunity to work in the church office for about a year. And he was very, very strict. At nine o'clock... he wanted to get a telephone call, no matter who was there. And with me being a teenager I was shy, and I wanted to wait until the secretary got there to call for fear I'd get something mixed up. But one minute after nine, or two minutes after nine, he was on the phone. I had to answer the phone sometimes cause the secretary wasn't there. He said, "Well Catherine, I thought I told you to call me at nine o'clock."

I said, "I was waiting for you."

"Wait a minute, I didn't say you wasn't, I told you to call me at any cost." He would scold me for waiting to call.

(Wilhelmina Lewis Means) I was practically born here. Reverend Bradby blessed me as a baby. My father was a member here, but my mother was a member of Bethel A.M.E. And I had a

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little brother who was ill, so my mother could not take me to Bethel. So, I started attending Second Baptist. I lived at 1464 Macomb, which is now Nicolet Avenue or Street. And the kids that lived in the neighborhood would walk to Second from there, and I'd started walking after my mother couldn't take me to Bethel with my brother being ill. So, I finally joined here. And after my brother passed, my mother said, "We'll keep the family together." She joined. But, as a youngster, I came to daily Vacation Bible School here. Well, I went to Bethel to Sunday School, but when I got a little older I joined the Sunshine Band in here. That was a little missionary group of small children. When I was eight years old, I was secretary of the Sunshine Band, and Mrs. Jenkins was the advisor or group leader of that group. And then, as Catherine said, later on the youth missionary group, Second Baptist Red Circle was one of the largest in the state, because we at one time had 300 members. And Ernestine was also in the Red Circle. And we had a very active group. We had in there young people who had a quartet, Grasty isn't up here, but she played the saxophone. And we would go to nursing homes and give programs, and we did a lot of things.

During the First World War Reverend Bradby would have members of the community to meet the people come from the South, at train stations, to bring them in, to see that they had housing and food, and got them jobs. Even though our membership has diminished over the years, it's because the

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city has expanded and there are many churches that have grown up.

(Edna McGregor) Well, I came and I was always amazed at how early you had to get here in order to get a seat. And many a Sunday, I stood along this wall because I could not find a seat, and I was just one person. And the ushers were squeezing people together just as much as they possibly could, and they looked at me, I was about that wide, trying to find a spot for me to sit in.

(Ernestine Wright) I arrived in Detroit, Michigan the 29th of January, 1929 from Parma, Louisiana where I had lived all my life. My grandmother heard it was very cold up north in the winter time. She gave me a Union suit. I was well organized from neck to ankle. So you can see I knew all about unions before industry did. It was like Noah's Ark - one door you got in from the front, and they had a sliding back window in the back. And when I arrived, sure enough it was one of the coldest winters since I've been here. I had eight dollars over and above my fare. My sister Sally believed in saving, so I put that in her savings account.

In the early 30's, the rich were jumping off the Belle Isle bridge. Blacks didn't have any decent jobs anyways and lost what they did have which was domestic work. Many negro men left their families, came north to work at Ford factory... five dollars a day... and they paid them off in cash that same day so we could buy food and pay room rent. Reverend Bradby

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would meet the trains, give them a place to stay overnight. As soon as they were able to, they sent and got their families here. Second Baptist membership grew to 4,000 soon.

Reverend Bradby was pastor from 1910 to 1946. He was a strong leader, with lots of dignity. No one rattled in and out of their coat before the benediction was given. Nor did they walk out of the service, chewing gum, nor pass any notes unless it was an emergency. If anyone became ill, he would ask if there was a doctor in the house.

Reverend Bradby preached his last sermon, let's see if I got this right, "the old ship of Zion," and died in his office that Monday morning. He stepped on board and went to heaven.

(Ernestine Wright) I love Second Baptist Church because their vespers has meant so much to me through the years when my husband was sick all those years. I have known times when I didn't have my meal for the next day but I didn't cry. But, I did come to the church and I told them I wanted to borrow some money. They gave me \$80 that I wanted to borrow. When I got able to pay them back, I said I would pay them back on installment plan. They said, "no, you don't pay nothing back. This is for you. You don't pay it back." So that made me more and more dear to Second Baptist Church. My sister told me when I first came here, she said, "Don't you join Macedonia, we plan to go to Second Baptist." So that very night, I joined the church that night.

(Mr. Nathaniel Leach) I came to Detroit in 1922, a young

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lad from Tuscaloosa, Alabama. My mother lived there on Sherman near Riopelle. Sherman Street was south of Gratiot. Gratiot represented a dividing line for Blacks to live. My first job was as porter in a barber shop right next door. Actually a porter has all kinds of cleaning jobs. My job was to clean the spittoons. I'd pick up about a dollar, a dollar and half on Sunday, so that I'd go to church. Sunday School then was after church. It was a rule that you couldn't go to the show with the kids unless you went to Sunday School.

So, we'd make sure we could go to the show, so we came to Sunday School. Only the old timers would remember Monroe, Gratiot, Hastings. You'd have the Jewel, the Rosebud, Castle, Bijou. Those are the theaters that would show you a movie and a comedy and you could make about three shows a Sunday. They didn't last that long. A regular feature plus a comedy. You'd be in the show about an hour and a half.

(Elaine Moon) And then you'd go to the next one another hour? That's 4 1/2 hours, plus church?

(Mr. Leach) Yes, you'd go down Gratiot and up Hastings and finally end up on Gratiot and Orleans, and I'd be close to home.

(Elaine Moon) You were very well organized. Do you remember any of the moviewes, the kinds of movies that you saw?

(Mr. Leach) Well, cowboy movies...always a cowboy....continued next week. Or some thriller that would keep you in suspense till next week, so you'd have to come

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back and see what happened. And they would take part of the show to show you what ended and go on so....it was some type of a serial movie and a comedy. And you'd go to another show and you would see the same thing. So, that was a regular Sunday routine after Sunday School.

As I said, I was a Sunday School student, joined in 1922. So in April of 1924, two years later, I joined the church and was baptized. And to tell you a story about the Pool, and baptism, I often relate that Ralph Bunche was baptized September 4th in 1927. But I point out that I was baptized in the same Pool before Ralph Bunche. Students go up there and see the place where Ralph Bunche was baptized, but they'd never know that I was baptized first.

In those days, we only had one place we could eat downtown, that was the Broadway Market.....they would serve us, us Blacks, at the market. At first it was all right, then the Whites complained that more Blacks were occupying the seats than the Whites, so eventually they had everyone standing up, took out all the chairs.....and every place where you could eat standing up. Broadway Market then was across on Broadway from the Board of Education.

So, gradually, Crowley's, they would let Blacks eat there. Hudson's had Blacks eat at Hudson's, there in the cafeteria on the balcony. But the main dining room, which I think was on the 4th floor... we weren't allowed to eat up there. And someone mentioned about streetcars... well, the streetcars...

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a motorman could be Black, but the conductor had to be White. That was a standard rule, you just couldn't get that job if you were Black. So, Blacks could not handle the money or deal with the public as such because the conductor would have the right to put someone off the bus that didn't pay his fare. So Black people couldn't do this, so we'd be the motorman. So the motorman often would stop his streetcar right in front of his house, if he lived there, and go in and take five minutes and get a bite to eat....five or ten minutes, so you'd go on waiting till he was done. Then they had the type of streetcar one time where it was open in the back, and the conductor operated it from the back more than up front. And the conductor in the back let people on and sometimes you'd get on and hold on from the outside and by the time he would ask the person for money, he'd get off.

Bradby was very influential by being hired by Ford to represent Ford Motor Car Company and okay the Blacks getting jobs and then to act as a trouble shooter. They had a factory in Highland Park and River Rouge. Bradby would go back and forth acting as a trouble shooter. When the Whites did not want to work with Blacks or didn't get along with Blacks or vice versa, Bradby was the trouble shooter. So those were some of things that come to mind.

(Dr. Arthur M. Carter) My family joined Second Baptist back before 1920. My great grandparents, Gussie and Appleton Lawrence, joined Second Baptist in about 1918 when they first

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came to Detroit. And, of course, as more family members came, everyone in our family was more or less required to join Second Baptist Church. In 1948, I was eight and my brother four; but in those days, it was acceptable for an eight year old to take a four year old and walk up Gratiot Avenue and feel perfectly safe.

So, I guess my earliest memories of Second Baptist Church were as a kid. I sat there with my great grandmother, and I remember Reverend Bradby vaguely... but I do remember him on the day that he died, because our house was very, very sad. My great grandmother announced that Reverend Bradby had died, and it was a tremendous shock to our family as it was to many others.

Mrs. Louise Reid, the Junior Church director, had a profound influence on me along with many other young people in those days. It was from that time that I started learning a great deal about Africa. Most people in the 1940's and '50's did not know a great deal about Africa. Conversation about Africa within the Black community was not very popular until the 60's and the revolutionary activities in the 60's. But we were taught about Africa very early. Mrs. Reid had been there and had spent a great deal of time over there, and she would relate various stories about Africa.

She'd give vivid descriptions of the churches, of the foliage, and she would tell us simple stories about young people believing in God no matter what the circumstances are.

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I learned that the Vice President of the United States was going to be at Second Baptist. I sat in the sanctuary with my great grandmother. I was a young man by this time, about 22 or 23. And after we waited for a long time, this very large, red-faced man came down the aisle with his entourage... including Secret Service men. It was Lyndon Johnson, who was Vice President of the United States. John Fitzgerald Kennedy was President at the time. Vice President Johnson delivered a plaque to the Church commemorating the reading of the Emancipation Proclamation at Second Baptist Church back in 1863.

A number of the men would wear their badges to church which was an interesting phenomenon, because they were proud of the fact that they were working at a time when a lot of African Americans were not.

I remember getting off the bus and walking with my great grandparents, Appleton and Gussie Lawrence and passing the spot where the Fellowship Hall now stands. There was a store that sold pots and pans. I remember an old parrot who used to sit there on the corner (laughter). He sometimes would talk, and that was the highlight of my day. I would say, "Hi, Polly, Polly Parrot." He would sometimes respond, if he felt like it. I can remember the parrot very vividly.

(Dr. Carter) Prior to my birth in Detroit in 1940, my great grandfather and great grandmother, in the late teens, joined Second Baptist Church which, at that time, was under

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the leadership of Robert L. Bradby, who was an outstanding minister of the oldest African American church in the city of Detroit and the State of Michigan, founded in 1836.

The story goes that Reverend Bradby could pick up the phone and call Henry Ford I and was able to secure jobs for his members. That word, of course, got into the community and certainly beyond the boundaries of the city of Detroit.

I can remember my great grandfather coming to church along with the men of that era in the late '40's. They would wear their badges to church. I believe that, with the coming of the unions, there was a new hope for economic freedom along with the opportunity for Black and Whites to interact.

(Mr. Leach ???) A word or two about the badges and working at Ford's. Bradby had the inside track to Ford Motor Company that hired Blacks. When we sent our associate, Reverend Charles Hill to (???? hire at Ford, he became the ????). Reverend Hill was active in organizing and Ford Motor Company didn't want no organization. They didn't want the union. There was a split there. Reverend Bradby hired by Ford could not afford to displease in Ford. So he tried to be neutral. But Hill courted the organization. So there was a sort of a split there. And Bradby had to remain in a way, neutral. He couldn't say yes or no. But that became sort of a split, because people sprang up all over the city, the so-called leaders... the YMCA, YWCA and so forth, other churches. So each one was in a contest to have an in in hiring Blacks.

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And this sort of left Bradby to slip down and down and caused him to lose power. And he could no longer send Blacks to get jobs because if he said he would support unionizing, he would be on the outs with Ford's. So that's the one thing that happened about wearing the badges to church. Another thing, I don't want to let us forget that coming downtown to the theater - there was only one, what we called theater, where we'd go to see plays or stage shows. There was only one for us, the Koppin theater, which was on Gratiot between Beaubien and Brush. And that's where we saw all of these stars making records... Mavis Smith, Becky Smith and Burten Beans and Suzie. See, the oldtimers remember those, cause that's where you really saw vaudeville at its best.