

INTERVIEW OF JUANITA ROSARIO DIGGS

Oral History Project of the WestSiders

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Interview Conducted by: Louis Jones

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Q Thank you for taking time out of your schedule to talk to us about the Westsiders and what that means to you and what that meant to you then. We much appreciate it.

Just to begin, tell us about your parents: where they are from and how they met and how did they get to Detroit?

A Thanks for having me as a part of this; it is an honor. My mother was born in what was called Belize British Honduras. At the time they were under British control. Now it is called Belize City. It is in Central America. My father was from Bonaire Netherlands, Antilles. I think people would be more familiar with Curacao. My father was a sailor. My grandma, my mother's mother, came to the United States because she had been ill and the doctors there suggested that my grandfather send her to the United States; they could not find out what was causing this pain. It wound up being gallstones. She did not want to go back to Belize. She had ten children. One died at birth and she brought all of them except two to the United States to live for a better life, which is what she told us. They were in New Orleans. My father was a sailor on a ship, and my grandma had a rooming house.

My father came to visit one of the sailors that was on the boat with him that stayed at the rooming house, and saw my mom, and that was it. Then they went to Chicago for a better living. There were other people from Belize that had migrated to the States and told them about Detroit, Henry Ford and the plant and the big money, what, five dollars a day or whatever. So they came to Detroit. My oldest brother, Calvin, was born in New Orleans. My brother, Gustavas, who is two years older than I, was born in Detroit as well as the rest of the family. My sister, Maria, and my sister, Carmelita, we were all born in Detroit.

Q Where did your family first live when they moved to Detroit, was it the West Side or somewhere else?

A The West Side, but we lived on Stanford for a short time. I didn't realize until recently looking at my birth certificate that we were living on 30th, but not in the home that I remember as my home. It was a block down. I was born on 30th between Cobb and Milford, but all of my school days we lived between Cobb and McGraw. We also lived on Colfax, but people moved a lot. It was during the Depression and if you could find a better rent or more room because it was a pretty large family, because also two of my cousins lived with us. My mother brought one cousin and my aunt brought the other. They were like sister and brother to us. They were older. We lived together and we had a very close family. We were certainly not wealthy, but we didn't even realize that. We were just happy all of the holidays and are close to this day, the ones that are still living. I have an aunt that will be 102 this year and her home is still on Hancock between McKinley and Roosevelt. The family still lives there.

Q Did your family rent or own or was it a combination of

both?

A We never owned. My aunt and her husband owned the house on Hancock. We never did; we always rented.

Q Tell us something about what your folks did for a living.

A Okay. Mom was a housewife. I remember my father working at Hygrade Packing Plant on Michigan Avenue where they slaughtered and packaged animals. It was a packing company. I know in the summertime we could smell the unpleasant odor from that area; it was blood and whatever. I remember my dad was permitted to bring meats home that he shared with the neighbors. Like I said, it was hard times.

Then he worked at the Ford Plant, River Rouge, and he worked in the foundry where they filed blocks. I don't know what they were used for. I can remember his undershirts would be rust color when he would come home. My mom used to boil his shirts on a stove. We had a little gas stove in the basement next to the furnace. I guess when women did their laundry, they boiled it to get it clean. She would get them clean. They would be white.

Later after the union was at Ford's, he was given goggles to wear. That was the only protection that he had. Finally he was just fed up one summer during World War II, he walked out and never went back.

Q What made him fed up?

A It was the conditions, the heat. I don't know what all went on. You know at that time black people caught it. They had the worst jobs in the plant even though they gave

them the jobs. It was hot because they had furnaces where he was grinding these blocks, and it was just hot. One day he left and never went back. He was a decorator. He painted. He did that afterwards. He was an excellent painter. They finally moved to California and did buy their own home. People would say to me, "oh, I miss your dad. I wish he was here to do my decorating." That is how he survived after that. They moved to California and lived a wonderful life until they both passed.

Q How did he get into painting?

A On the boat when he was a sailor, they painted the boats. That is how he learned that skill. We asked him in later years. He also had his own paint store in Pasadena, California. My sister, Carmelita married a young man that became a physician and they moved to California. That is how my mom and dad went to California.

Q What did your mother do for a living?

A Just a housewife, with five kids, that was full-time. She was there when we left in the morning and she was there when we came home in the evening. She was a wonderful mother, very strict. I don't regret her strictness at all, because she made us turnout to be very good people.

Q Let's talk about that. How was she strict or what did she do or have you do or not do?

A Our house was on the corner but there was an alley on the side. We couldn't go across the alley until we were much older. We couldn't go down the street. We didn't dare cross the street. I never went to a basketball game or football game. I was on the tennis team, but I had to leave because she wouldn't let me go to the games that took place

other than at Northwestern. I guess that was it. We did go to the show on Sundays. We could go to the Granada and there was a Beechwood Theatre also that we went to. For the holidays, like Easter or Christmas, we could go downtown to the show. But other than that, we went to school and came home. She always knew where we were.

Then as we got older, we could cross the alley and roller skate. I don't miss not going to the games; it is such a small part of your life. Children don't realize that now. If they can't go everywhere and have all of the designer clothes and shoes, they are miserable.

We played. I remember taking Pet Milk cans and taking the paper off of them when they were empty, and we took rocks and would mash it, and take the rock and pry it up around the soles of our shoes. We would walk up and down the street with these Pet Milk cans on our feet because they made a noise. We played marbles and hopscotch. We had all of the little things to make us happy. Summertime we sat on the porch at night and we played movie star. You would give the initials and you would guess who the movie star was. We would stay out because it was cool to stay out at night. You would go in the house; nobody had air conditioning; you opened the window; it had a little screen in it to keep the mosquitoes out. We just had good times. That was great for us to stay out late at night. Mom was on the porch and so was my father. We still had good times.

Q Do you recall things that the family did together?

A I remember Belle Isle. We didn't have a car. My cousin -- the one I told you lived with us who was older -- had a friend that had a car. We would go out on trips: first load would go and then the second load would go. We had a spot that was near the Canadian side, which was like a

little island, because my grandma was cripple. She had Infantile Paralysis as a child. So we found a place where there was a restroom. She could go right across the street.

We would take her over there. Also they would permit you to swim on that side at the time that I was a child. They would have it roped off. That was the Canadian side. It was past the baseball diamond at Belle Isle. When we finally did get a car, I remember my father driving us. It was either Tireman or Joy Road west and there was a place that sold ice cream and people would line up. I can remember some people would have mixing bowls that you would use to mix cakes or whatever. They would buy the ice cream by the scoops. It was so good and I guess they took it back home.

He would drive us out there. We went to Rouge Park. He would drive us to what I think was now Wyandotte. You go out Jefferson Avenue and drive and drive and drive. Let's see what else did we do? Holidays: Christmas, my mom made fruit cake and would give it to the neighbors. She also made wine. You could make so much wine, if you wanted to. She made wine and she would give a bottle of wine and fruit cake to some of the neighbors. Also my aunt and her family at their home, we would share that.

I can remember my father bringing a Christmas tree home one year. He walked to Livernois. We didn't have a car at that time. He pulled that Christmas tree all the way in the snow from Livernois to 30th. He just pulled the tree home. We didn't have Christmas tree stands at that time, and we would use a bucket, that you would use to scrub the floor. He would put ashes and clinkers from the coal. We had the furnace that you would shake in the basement. He would put those clinkers in to support the tree. Then he would pour water in it to keep it moist. Mom would wrap a sheet around it. We had lights on the tree. I can remember coming home after Thanksgiving and the curtains would be down.

We knew that mom was getting ready for Christmas. When we would come home, she would have the Christmas wreath that she put away each year. Then when we would come home and see the Christmas wreath hanging in the window with freshly done curtains. It was just little things that made you so happy.

I remember the old car, the first car we got. Like I said my father was painting then. He painted the car with paint that was left over. It was like a lime or chartreuse color car. We could always tell when he was coming home. We called him Dotty. We would say, here comes Dotty. We would see the car coming down from Cobb. We enjoyed that car. We had many, many good times. He would drive us on the East Side sometimes, which was like another world, down Hastings. The people that lived there lived entirely different from the way we did, even though we were poor. It was just the different way that they lived. They barbecued out on the front; just standing out in the street. We didn't do that on our side of the town. We were amazed. "Oh, look, look, look," we said. Those people were happy also with the way that they lived.

But we had wonderful times. I remember when my grandma had a stroke, though, that was a frightening time for me. She and my mom had been canning. I remember that night they were canning tomatoes. They came up to bed and my mom waited for my grandma to come out of the bathroom; she stayed so long and my mom finally knocked on the door. My grand mother didn't respond. So my mom went in and my grandma was on the floor. There was a doctor that lived up over his office on Warren and someone walked down there and called him because we didn't have a phone. He came and then they called the -- I don't know what you call it now. It is like EMS is now. I can remember

them taking my grandma down the steps on the stretcher. It was frightening to me because I didn't understand it. I thought she had died. It was scary to me, but she was fine.

She had no impairment from the stroke. She was fine after she stayed in the hospital quite sometime.

I was trying to think of things that we did as a family. We were very active in our church. We attended St. Benedict the Moor, which was a Catholic Church. We were all christened in that church. I was in the choir. We had a lot of activities at the church. During World War II, the catholic men organized a group of young women to write to the men that attended our church and also St. Leo Church. We wrote letters to the fellows in the service. We were called the Catholic Girls Club. Even afterwards, we stayed organized until I guess we all married and drifted away from it. I had good times at church, the picnics that we had, and school.

I enjoyed especially Sampson School. I can remember there was a group called the Sampson School Spiritual Singers. As I look back now, it might have been demeaning, but it was not demeaning to me at the time, and the other young girls. We were dressed like slave women that we see pictures of with the long dresses and the hair tied up in a turban. The material matched the dress. I don't know if we wore aprons or not. You were honored if you were picked to sing in that group. They would take us on trips to different places to sing. We went to the Rotunda. I don't know if you are familiar with the Rotunda. It was built out near the Ford plant in Dearborn. They had a lot of exhibits there at Christmas time. They had Christmas trees all decorated. It caught on fire in later years, and I don't know if that building is still there or not. They also had affairs, like the singing group. We went on the bus at night.

Oh, boy. The bus took us out there and we sang all of the spiritual songs that they felt probably the slaves sang. One of them was "Rocka My Soul in the Bosom of Abraham." We were on the stage, just swaying back and forth. Like I said maybe it was demeaning to have been dressed that way, but we didn't feel that it was. It was an honor to be chosen to be a part of that. Mrs. Cunningham was the teacher. Mr. O.D. Reynolds was the Principal. They thought it was great. Maybe it was, I can't say that it wasn't.

The lady, the teacher, our Home Ec teacher made the outfits for us that we wore. I guess the school supplied money for the material. It was good times there.

Q Can you think of any other things that went on in Sampson, things or any teachers or relationships that you may have had?

A I remember Mrs. Martin, our literature teacher when my brother, Gustavas, had pneumonia. She was very fond of him. I can remember it was around Valentine's Day. She came to our house and she brought cards from all of the kids in the class. She brought a heart, and it was wrapped in shiny paper. It was a big chocolate heart that she brought for Gus. I remember that, and I also remember Mrs. Bethel, our gym teacher. We had three black teachers.

The first one was Mary E. Coates and Miss Bethel was our gym teacher. We were playing corner dodge ball and a young man landed on my left foot. I found out later it was a very bad sprain. Mrs. Bethel took me home in her car; I remember that. My brothers would tell me, she asked about me. "How is Juanita doing." So those were things that I remember. The kindness of the teachers. Some of them were very concerned, if they thought you were friendly with some little girls that they thought were fast, they would say, "I don't think you should associate with her." They were very

caring, most of them. There were some who were not. We were talking some of the WestSiders recently that we didn't feel prejudice there. It wasn't until later when I got to McMichael and especially Northwestern that I noticed a big difference in the teachers. They didn't have that family feeling like they were concerned about you. Maybe it was because we were at Sampson for so many years, from kindergarten to 8th grade, but I didn't get that feeling later years in school.

Q What happened at McMichael and Northwestern that made you realize it was a little bit different?

A They were just like teachers, like they didn't really care. I remember once we had to do a report. I don't remember the teacher's name or what class it was. We had to back it up with some source, a book or whatever it was. It was in ***Life Magazine***, that they had an article about race relations. It ended up saying that the biggest fear of the white man were black men marrying white women. I wrote this and turned it in, and the teacher was so angry that she dismissed me from the class. She said, "where did you get that information?" I told her from ***Life Magazine***. My brother always bought ***Life Magazine***. He worked at the gas station around the corner, so he had a little change and he always bought ***Life Magazine***. She was just upset about it. Mr. Bargett, who was the manual training teacher at Northwestern, was my homeroom teacher. I told him about it. He was so angry. I don't know what happened. I think he went to the principal of the school. Of course, I was back in the class. She was never nice to me after that. She wasn't nice to begin with. That, I remember.

There was another incident: my best girlfriend at Northwestern, we had double seats. I don't remember this

teacher's name. My brother, Gustavas, was staying over to work with Mr. Bargett because he was taking tool and die. "Tell mom that I will be home late." So he came to the door of the classroom and then he came in and asked the teacher if he could speak with me. I went out and he told me to tell mom. I came back in the room. The teacher took me back out in the hall. My best girlfriend and I were sharing the seat. She said, "what nationality are you?" I said, "I am colored." She says, "are you sure?" I said, "yes, I am colored." So she said, "when you go back in, take another seat." She had me sit with two white girls, rather than sit with my friend. There was a similar situation in that same class. There were two seats; there was a black boy by himself and a white fellow by himself. She would not let them share seats. I stayed in that seat the rest of the summer and it was hot. My parents didn't come over to school. Two white girls and I shared the double seats. My girlfriend sat by herself. Those were some of the things that I went through.

On Saturday, some of the boys would stay over at school. They would come and get extra help. Mr. Bargett took all of them to lunch up on Grand River. They wouldn't serve my brother. This was the same brother, the other teacher saw and thought maybe he was another race or something. Mr. Bargett walked out of the restaurant. Mr. Bargett was a nice person. The other teachers were not warm like the teachers at Sampson.

Q Now, I understand that you were a part of the Student Council. How did that happen?

A Yes. It was after that incident that Mr. Bargett said, "I want you to run for Student Council." I did. That was interesting. We did some things. At that time I don't think

they had black cheerleaders. Some of those things changed during the years we were there. I don't think they had any black girls on the swim team. While some of the things took place, World War II was going on and so a lot of things were beginning to change.

Q Talking about the war, I am sure there were friends of yours in school with you at Northwestern that went off to the war?

A My two brothers did. Yes, I remember my oldest brother: he graduated that June from Northwestern and went right into the Army.

Then my younger brother went into the Navy. I remember going down and seeing both of them off. My youngest sister cried and cried. I remember someone saying, "is that her father?" We said, "no, that is her brother." My mom lost weight. She was so worried and she said someone told her, one of the neighbors, "Miss Rosario, you are going to grieve yourself to death. You have three girls here that you are responsible for." She said that turned her around. She got so thin. She just worried and worried. I can understand especially now that I am a mom how that must have been. My oldest brother was in Guam. He was over there in the jungles where the fighting was going on. My youngest brother was in the Navy. He stayed in Florida. They sent them out but he didn't go overseas. Then the war ended. I don't remember anyone that died that I knew. We got our little V-mail, the letter. It folded over. You couldn't write much; they didn't want them to be heavy and thick, sending them back and forth.

I remember our stamps that we had for gasoline and meat. You had to tear these stamps off; you were allowed only so

much meat. I think they rationed butter, too. You got a book for each member of the family. You had to tear these stamps out to buy that. I can also remember the tin cans. We would wash the cans out, cut the two ends off and insert the lids inside and mash them flat. They would pick those cans up. I don't remember how often, because they said they recycled. At that time they were not using that term. They used them in the war for something; I don't know what they used them for. We used to have a box that we kept them in. I remember that about the Second World War.

Q Tell us about your neighbors that lived right next door and right across the street and the relationship that your family had with them?

A Well, the house that we lived in was a four family, like condos are now. They were up and down. We shared a porch, with the railing between. They were the Thompsons. I don't know if you have heard of Jo Thompson; she is an entertainer. She played piano and sang. She lived there. She had a brother, I think he is a doctor out in California or some where; I am not sure. We were very close. Mom would sit there in the evening with Mrs. Thompson and they would talk in the summertime about things that were happening, and share recipes and do little things like that. They talked a lot.

There was another family the, Smedleys, that lived down on the corner. There were four of these flats and we always said that every time mom had a baby, Mrs. Smedley had a baby. They were very, very close. We all grew up together. Those were the children that we shared games with and hopscotch and all of that and played with. There were other families. My best girlfriend, Mattie Hall, lived further down. Then my sister's friend -- they were all

scattered down the street. We were all friends. We inquired about each other, if anybody was sick. When Miss Smedley had a baby, mom went down and helped her. It was a close, close neighborhood. We all walked to school together from house to house. We walked to school because you came home for lunch at that time. There was a lot of friendship there. Most of the men worked at Ford, so they were all friends there. There was Mr. Thompson and a Mr. Whitner lived there also. My father and my uncle, they played cards on Saturday. They played whist. They took turns at each other's house. When it was at my house, we could hear them downstairs if they had a Boston or whatever. You could hear the cards: "pow, pow, beat that, beat that!" There was no money exchanged. Every Saturday they would get together. Then there were baseball games. My father was for the Tigers. My uncle was for the New York team; whatever the team was, I don't remember. They would have their little arguments about who was going to win the series. It was, like I said, good times.

Q Were there clubs or organizations that you or your family were active in?

A Later, I think it was after the Second World War, my mother and father were in a Mr. & Mrs. Club. Of course, the Nacirema, that was like the social club in the neighborhood; it is still in existence. It is on 30th at Milford. My mom and father didn't go there, but my aunt and uncle went to the Nacirema Club. They had boat rides that the Nacirema sponsored; they would go on the boat rides. But my parents didn't go. We just had good times.

Q Was your father a part of the UAW or any other union?

A My sister had all of my mom's things out in California and we came across some of the receipts where he paid his dues. He was a part of the union. I remember when they had that fight at Ford Plant, where the union people were locked in the building. Some of them were killed. There were some injured. My father wasn't there, but the people that were there, they couldn't come out. That was a scary time; I remember that.

Q Was he active in the union?

A Other than paying his dues, that was it. They didn't hold big positions in the union until later on. Other than paying his dues, that was it.

Q I am skipping here a little bit. You talked about the church that you attended?

A St. Benedict the Moor.

Q Tell me about Father Duquette?

A He was there before me. Then there was Father Kapp, and then Father Diehl was the one that I remember. He was there longer during my time. But there was Father --

Q --Norman Duquette?

A He was a black priest. He was not there when I went there.

Q Any particular memories about the different priests?

A Father Diehl was very down to earth. A lot of the older people would go there after church to the house right next to the church and socialize with him. He was very nice.

They used to bring the nuns from one of the convents on either Tuesday or Thursday to teach us Catechism. That was because there was no Catholic school there except for one across Warren. It was Polish and they only spoke Polish. So we didn't go to that school. So they would bring the nuns in to teach us what they called catechism, which was all about the church and it prepared us for First Communion and Confirmation. So we had instruction every week. They would come only during the school year. That is where we actually got our training and our lessons about the Catholic Church. I don't know who drove them. They came every week. We had bazaars at the church. They would have the wheel that you would spin, and they would have gambling, I guess. I don't know if they had money or not. Food was sold: breads and pies and things like that. We had Easter plays, and right next door to me they turned that house into a church. It was a Baptist church. Mom would let us go there. We had good times there; that was really good.

Q What was the name of the church?

A What was that church? I remember the minister's name was Robert L. Jordan. I can't think of the church's name.

Q You said you had good times there, what kind of things did you do there?

A Well, you know the Baptist church is a little more lively than the Catholic Church. They had a lot of plays and extracurricular activity over there. They would have banquets. I enjoyed going there; it was nice.

Q It seems in the same way people watch TV now,

similarly people listened to the radio. Did you guys have a radio?

A Yes, we did. Since we didn't have homework at Sampson, when we came home from school, mom would turn the radio on. We couldn't touch the radio. I think we had a Zenith. She always listened to the news in the morning; it was sponsored by Hudson's. Then they played music from different operas in the morning. In the evening we listened to the **Lone Ranger** and **Mystery Theater** with *Jack Dock and Reggie*. We also listened to **the Green Hornet** and **Amos & Andy**, all of those old shows. Every evening we would listen to them. They came on every evening, not once a week. About 8:00pm, we were on the way upstairs to bed.

I can remember when Joe Louis beat Max Schmelling. My father took a little portable radio upstairs and we were all in bed, lights were out, listening to that fight. People just celebrated afterwards. You could hear the newsboy on the street. I remember that. We used our radio a lot. We would read a lot. We would walk to Lothrop Library, which was at the Boulevard and Warren, on Saturday and get books. We did a lot of reading. We had to do reports at school. I enjoyed reading a lot.

Q You mentioned Joe Louis before; how would people celebrate?

A If they were drinking, I don't know. They were not destructive. They would just be out on the street, hollering, "he won, he won," like that. Whoever had cars, they drove up and down the street. I remember that night.

Q Do you remember when he lost to Max Schmelling

before?

A I don't. I don't remember that. I don't even know what year that was that he lost. I was thinking too, I mentioned some other time about the Lindbergh baby being kidnapped; and that traumatized me.

Q Why?

A Because all I could think of was my parents talking about it and hearing about it on the radio. My sister was born March 31st of that same year and I thought that man was going to come and take our baby. All I could think was the dining room window. I don't know why, but I thought that he was going to climb in that window and take our baby. I remember that. I was 4 years old, but I remember it.

Also that house we lived in on Scotten then. The fire station was behind our house. My grandma used to cook and take food to the fence for the firemen. I can remember that. She would take food, although we didn't have that much. That was probably '31 and '32. She would take food to the firemen at the fence; and they would come. I remember. I think that Christmas they gave us something. I can remember having a chick. My cousin brought a little chick home for Easter at that house. I don't know what happened to the little chick, but I remember we were all excited about that.

Q Tell me about segregation and the discrimination that you would have dealt with?

A During that time?

Q Could you share with us a couple of instances that you experienced?

A Segregation: I remember the riot that they had, that was in '43.

Q '43?

A '43 I think. I don't remember like at school like I said when I went to Northwestern. I don't remember segregation in the neighborhood too much. There was a white fellow that lived on our block. We called him Birdie because he whistled all of the time. He used to cross to go over to Warren. There was a bar over there that he used to frequent. He went over there and they beat him up on the way home. When he got to our house, my father took him and walked him home down the street, because he was bleeding all over. People stood on Warren Avenue and McGraw because a lot of people that worked at Ford traveled through down Warren to go home. On one side were whites and on our side were blacks. They were throwing rocks at the cars as they would go by. I remember that. We were afraid at night, though, because they said they were going to come across and kill us. We had nothing to protect ourselves. It subsided and that was that.

Speaking of Warren Avenue, I can remember when the circus would come to town. They would bring the elephants down Warren Avenue in a parade because they housed the circus and the animals on Livernois. It was a lot of open space up there. They would bring the animals because they went to the Olympia for the circus. I don't know if you are familiar with the Olympia. That was at Grand River and McGraw. That is where they had the Joe Louis fights and hockey and other sports. That is where they would have the circus, and they would bring the elephants down Warren Avenue. We were all excited to see the parade come to town. I remember that.

Q I want to probe on the segregation a little more. I understand you could not go into the YMCA across the street from Northwestern and that you had to go into the balcony at the Beechwood Theater?

A Oh, right, we did. Also we had to sit in the balcony at the Granada. I don't think the Beechwood had a balcony; the Granada did. And what was the other?

Q The YMCA --

A That was the Fisher Y at Dexter and the Boulevard. Blacks could not go to that Y. It was the male Y. They could not go there. Also you couldn't live on the other side of Tireman.

I guess you know about the McGhee case.

Q Yes, when that was getting off the ground and going through the system, so to speak, what were your thoughts about all of that?

A I don't remember being aware of it until later. Now Orsel and I were in the same class and his brother, Reginald, was a couple of years older. I think he was in my brother Gus's class. I don't remember that. We were probably at Northwestern at the time. I didn't realize that was going on in their lives until afterwards about them buying that house there, and what they were going through to stay there. I don't remember that until later years. I know that you didn't live across there. I know that. You didn't live across Epworth, either. That was as far as we went, and Warren. On the other side was all Polish people and some Mexicans later.

Q Now, tell us, my sense is that you had a big wedding.

I have seen photos of it.

A Yes, I did.

Q Tell us about that?

A The wedding?

Q The wedding.

A The wedding was at St. Benedict the Moor Church and afterwards the reception was at his parent's home. We had a garden reception.

Q We can move on.

A Okay.

Q I have heard so much about the West Side. Now, what is it about the west side that resulted in so many prominent people coming up out of that section of the city: Damon Keith, John Conyers and many other folks as well. What was it about that section?

A I think one thing was that we had good teachers at Sampson. Now Damon didn't go to Sampson. He lived across what we call the Boulevard. I imagine they had good teachers, too. Also you had striving parents that had good morals and parents that wanted more for their children. Education was very important. My mother never let me do dishes or anything. She had me get to the table and do my homework. That was it. She never wanted anything to interfere with our homework. They exposed you to music. I played the piano. My sisters did. My brother, the oldest one, played the violin and the second one played the bass. He played with Dorthy Donegan and some other people.

They tried to give you everything they could give you. I remember taking tap dancing at one time. That was not my thing. I think much of that was repeated throughout that neighborhood, not just at my home. The teachers had a big interest in their pupils. We were at Sampson for nine years counting kindergarten. They knew the parents. Parents came to school. They talked to the teachers. You were not threatening the teachers. We were afraid if we had a note sent home or the grades were not up to par; you were punished.

Q Did you ever have a note at home or bad grades?

A No, but my second brother did sometimes. It wasn't because he wasn't smart. I don't know what he was doing. But they would get on him. Then he did fine. They didn't take anything from you. I think the interest of the parents and they wanted better for you. We had a lot of people that came from the South and came to Detroit for a better living. I think schooling in the South was more important than in the North. It was important for them. They saw what an education could do, where it could lead you. I think that had to lot to do with it.

Q You know the term we often hear these days, it sounds like it applies to when you are growing up: it takes a village

A Right.

Q How was the West Side a village?

A Because you not only were concerned about what your parents were going to do, the neighbors would come and tell your parents, "I saw so and so on the street that she shouldn't have been on." The people would come and tell

your parents. The neighbors would tell your parents and you used that as a guide to say, "well, I won't do that because Mrs. Hall or Mrs. Thompson or Mrs. Blackwell will see" and go and tell on you.

Q What role did the House of Diggs play in the community?

A The House of Diggs was on the East Side. So I don't think they played any part on the West Side at all. I married into that, but I don't think they had anything to do with the West Side.

Q What do you tell your children and your grandchildren about growing up on the West Side, anything in particular?

A I started talking to them recently because I realized that I am getting along. I have told my children about things that happened and about walking to school. My son was telling me his daughter wanted some shoes costing one hundred and fifty dollars. He said "oh, no, no, no, your grandma walked to school with high tops two times a day going to school. She didn't have all of those things, and you don't need them either." I started telling them about experiences that we had. We wore long stockings. We didn't have down jackets or somebody dropping you off at school in a nice warm car. You walked to school and you walked back home. Many times at school, they would let us put our shoes under the radiator to dry and put our gloves on the radiator so when we got ready to go home, they would be dry. Our shoes would be wet. We had galoshes. If you had them, they were rubber, to pull up over your shoes. Sometimes they had holes in them, and your shoes would get wet. It is a different world.

Q Tell me about Milford Street. Was it a bustling kind of a street?

A It was.

Q Tell us about that?

A Milford Street had ice cream parlors, shoe shops, barbeque, beauty shops, drug stores, stores where they would sell vegetables; it was a thriving street. And if you had the five cents, the kids would come from school, walk down and get an ice cream cone on the way home.

The Thompsons had shoe shops, repair shop and later they sold shoes. Then you had Mrs. Hawkins of Hawkins Apparel. She used to sell clothes from door to door. Later she opened up her shop; it was on Milford. You had just about everything that a little community needed to survive; much of it was owned by blacks. I don't think they owned the building, but they owned the business. It was a busy little area over there.

Q Thank you very much, Mrs. Rosario Diggs.

A Thank you.

Q We appreciate this opportunity and this brings it all to light what this community was all about and we appreciate that. I am honored to be a part of the project.

A That's good; I think it is a wonderful project.

Q I certainly agree.