

The John S. and Drucie R. Chase Building Archive
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Ms. Arlene Youngblood Oral History

- [Interviewer] Could you please tell me your name?

- My name is Arlene Lois Youngblood.

- [Interviewer] And where are you from?

- I am from Austin, Texas,
grew up in East Austin,

but I was born in Lancashire, England

at Burtonwood Air Force Base.

My mom and dad met in England
while she was studying nursing
and dad was in the Air Force.

Mama was from Jamaica and
dad is a native Austinite.

He was from Austin, Texas.

- [Interviewer] Oh, okay.

So thinking about East Austin,

will you tell me the
street that you grew up on

and what it was like for you?

- I grew up at 1306 Cotton Street

and San Bernard is
perpendicular to Cotton Street.

And then Angelina's the other part of it.

Very beautiful flourishing neighborhood,

lots of kids during the
time that I was there.

Everybody looked out for each other.

We had Olivet Baptist Church,
which was just across the street.

So most of us went to
Vacation Bible School

over at Olivet as well as going

to Vacation Bible School
at my home church,

Wesley United Methodist Church.

But it's a fun time.

We had lots of professionals,

Black professionals who lived there
from the twenties on up through.

Dr. Hammond, who was a dentist.

You had Fuller Mercer
Sheffield Funeral Home,

which was on Angelina right across
from the now Carver Museum.

So that was a funeral home
that was in the neighborhood.

And Carver Library was where
the genealogy center was.

That was the original building

that was moved there from 1927 to Angelina

'cause the citizens, the
Black citizens demanded

that there be a library for that area
in the 1920s during segregation.

- [Interviewer] Right.

So I know we know now about
the disparities right,
between the amenities in East Austin
and other parts of the city.

And in some places, it wasn't
until like the seventies
that, you know, certain roads were paved
and things like that.

Thinking about for you growing up,
were you ever a kind of
aware of some of the?

- I wasn't aware of it 'cause
I was being a little kid.

I was enjoying being a little kid,
enjoying growing up with my family,
having beautiful neighbors,
being able to see Kealing Junior High,
their band march down San
Bernard going downtown.

My friend Kay Cheryl Walker,
she was our babysitter and Kay babysit us
and she was in the band
for Kealing and Anderson.

So I got a chance to enjoy
those things, those memories.

We did not get really paved streets,

I want to say probably,
maybe in the sixties.

I was in elementary school at that time.

And so we did get paved streets.

We did have the bus routes

that would come down 12th
street and also Rosewood.

So I wasn't aware of the disparities.

I'm busy being a kid.

So you become aware of the
disparities when you get older.

- [Interviewer] Understood.

So let's talk about schools.

- Yes.

- [Interviewer] Can you tell
me the schools you went to

and a little bit about each school,
what the experience was like for you?

- Okay, all right.

I will start with Ebenezer Nursery School
now known as Ebenezer
Child Development Center.

That's where me and my younger brother
and my younger sister attended,

Alvin Junior and my
sister Stella Youngblood.

Stevie didn't get that
experience going to Ebenezer

'cause we traveled and
moved different places

when dad was in the service.

But I had a beautiful experience
of getting a very good foundation
with education and social skills
at Ebenezer Nursery School.

I attended Blackshear Elementary School,
first through fifth grade.

Excellent teachers, dynamic
teachers who worked hard,
made sure that we excelled at what we did.

And then from there, went to
JW Eater Junior High School
in Rantoul, Illinois at Chanute Air Base.

So I was there.

Ooh, let me back it up.

Sixth grade Pleasant, I think

Pleasant Acres Elementary
School for sixth grade

for that year and then
JW Eater Junior High

for seventh grade.

And then eighth and ninth grade,
over in Saragosa Spring,
University High School.

And then we returned to Texas in 1972
when dad retired from the Air Force
after 22 years of service.

And I attended McCallum High School,

10th through 12th grade.

- [Interviewer] Okay.

- So I went to segregated
and integrated schools.

So I like to let people know,

I'm a beneficiary of segregated
and integrated schools.

And then I like to remind people

when they're writing something
about their loved one,

especially if their older loved one

that might have attended Old Anderson

or whatever school that might
have been during segregation,

that they need to clarify
that the loved one graduated

from Austin Public School system

because AISD it was not created until 1971

after desegregation and immigration.

So when I see an old person who's died

and I see Austin Independent,
it did not exist.

It was segregated school systems.

So yeah, two different
systems, Austin Public Schools.

And then after desegregation
and integration,

then you had Austin Independent
School District in 1971

which was created at that time

and then they closed Old Anderson.

- [Interviewer] Okay, thank you

for clarifying that.

- Oh yeah,

when you just want to fall out,

when you see a obit or you see a write up

and you know, they 're
saying they went to Austin.

No, you did not.

It was not independent.

It was not integrated.

It was a segregated system
of Black and White schools

from elementary school, junior
high school, high schools.

- [Interviewer] Which is
actually a really good segue way

to thinking about the Colored
Teacher Association Building.

- Oh yeah.

- Did you have any
interaction or knowledge

of that space or not?

- I had no knowledge of it,

but my principal that I had,

Mr. Friendly Rudolf Rice,

who I had the honor of
him being my principal

as a little girl.

And then I have the honor
of having a friendship

with his daughter, Vannie Rice Gardner.

I had the privilege of being
able to work as a consultant

for the Blackshear Reunion

and the mural unveiling and
the Rice birthday celebration

in April of 2019 this year.

So I was able to glean

and get knowledge that Mr.
Rice was a local president

for the Colored Teachers Association.

And he worked very diligently,

not only in that role,

but he added improvements to Blackshear.

He created the first hot lunch program
in the school district during segregation.

So those students had a hot meal.

And then also he introduced having

the first library in Blackschools.

I really interpret that, he
had the first library, period.

Whether the schools were White or Black.

I believe that he really introduced

the first concept of the library
for Austin Public Schools

under the leadership
of* Mr. A.N. McCallum,

for which my high school's named after.

He was superintendent
for about 35 plus years.

So he was able to get
a lot of schools built

during his leadership time period.

- [Interviewer] And I had the honor

of going to the unveiling
for Principal Rice.

- Yes.

- [Interviewer] Unveiling and
it was just amazing hearing

some of the stories, as you mentioned

with the free lunch program.

- He worked hard.

- [Interviewer] The sense of
community was just really,

it was palatable.

Would you speak more about,

I know that there were
people, business owners

or professionals in the
community that also connected?

- During that time period, now because,

not just because we were segregated,

but because we were segregated,

we depended on each other

and had to create our own
entities, our own businesses.

You're looking at the fact that
we had dry cleaner businesses,
we had restaurants,
we had hotels, we had the Rambo Motel.

I'm trying to think
there is another motel.

The Deluxe, I think, had a motel as well.

And they had the restaurant,
which is on East 11th street.

You had dry cleaner businesses.

You also had shoe repair shops.

I think there was Mr. Madison
who mom used to have repair our shoes
when we need to get them fixed up.

You have photographers.

Mr. Sullivan was our photographer
for our family pictures and portraits.

And beauticians.

You all, I know that you will have,

the DDC is going to be utilizing

the Colored Teacher Association
Building which also served

as Ms. Pease Beauty Shop
for many, many years.

You go up to San Bernard

at that corner, which is now
known as the Delta house,

Madam Christensen or Madam
Christian had her beauty school.

So she trained many Black ladies to become beauticians.

Now, the thing that people don't realize is that

Black beauticians had to learn how to do Black hair

and White hair.

White beauticians don't have to worry about that.

They just focus on doing White folks hair.

But Black beauticians had to know more so that they could be more marketable and create more opportunities.

So those beauticians learned how to do Black hair and White hair.

And that still happens today.

But a lot of ladies, many of them have gone to glory now.

Ms. Willie Mae McArl.

Let's see Mrs. Ates who,

I want to say, what is Miss Mattie Proser Ates.

She used to do my hair.

Ms. McCall did grandma's hair.

Ms. Dorothy Nun who's retired now.

She's still alive, she's in her eighties.

And she learned under Madam Christianson.

She'd be a good interview subject over

at the (indistinct)
Assisted Living Center.

So you could just catch Ms.
Nun and get a nice picture

of her and interview her about
what it was like learning

under Madam Christianson.

'Cause she went to night school

and she was raising a family
while getting her training.

- [Interviewer] Wow, yeah,
I would definitely want

to speak with Ms. Nun.

- Yes, so Ms. Nun,

you need to catch Ms. Nun.

- [Interviewer] Ms. Nun, I'll
get her information from you.

- Yes, I'll be glad to
share that with you.

- [Interviewer] And thinking
about just beauty parlors

and barber shops and the Black community.

How important to just like
with information and voting.

- People looked out for each other.

Now you talking about voting.

Now let's go and break it on down in terms
of what we could do.

You had the businesses.

So you had a lot of entrepreneurship.

You had insurance agents.

Look at this wind coming
up right at the wrong time.

Anyway, you also had folks who
worked as domestics, porters.

My grandfather was the head waiter

at the restaurant at
Stephen F. Austin Hotel.

But those who were domestics and porters

and waiters and people who,
could be a street cleaner,

what have you, they were privy

because they worked for rich
White folks out West Austin.

Pardon my cough.

They worked for rich White
people out West Austin.

You also have to look
at the fact that prior

to the bus lines, you
had the cable car lines,

you had the cable cars.

So you had cable cars
that connected West Austin

to East Austin going down
12th Street and 11th Street.

That's why you hear the term east end.

And so you hear it and you say,
"Okay, what does that mean?"

You know, "Is it for the buses?"

No, it's prior to, and you
know, East Austin was hilly.

So you had all the hilly gullies.

So those people, those
persons who worked as cooks,
cleaned White people's homes,
took care of White people's children,
they were privy to the
activities that were going
on with the city, depending
on who was in power.

And they were able to
share that information

with maybe an organization,
maybe at the church,

or what have you.

Maybe with the NAACP so
that they could know how to do battle.

Also during that time period,
it was to their detriment

if their bosses knew,
their White bosses knew

they were a member of the NAACP,
'cause they could lose their jobs.

So they could never let
on that they were members

of the National Association
for the Advancement

of Colored People.

And that's through my papers

that I wrote when I was going to UT.

I have papers on file at
the Austin History Center.

So those things were shared
with me when I interviewed

Charles "Papa" Heinz,

he worked for the Gary Job Corps Center.

First Black selected by President Johnson
to manage the Gary Job Corps Center back
at that time period.

I interviewed Jay Phillip, not,

Jay Phillip Crawford, who was an attorney.

He is Felicia Crawford's dad.

He's deceased now, but he was an attorney.

I interviewed my grandfather, Doug.

Girl, and who's the other person?

Mrs. Ada Simon, who was my role model

for being East Austin historian.

She's deceased now.

- [Interviewer] Yes, and so it's funny.

It's like, you know what I'm going to ask

because this again is
I think a wonderful way

to cross into for you, you know,

especially thinking about
you living in other cities.

- Yes.

- [Interviewer] You know, what made you, you know, decide

to, you know, preserve and be a historian

of the community?

- Well I love history.

And then dad loves history and grandpa loved history.

And so it's part of me to have an interest,

not only just history in general, but in Black history.

I like Latino history as well.

And then Austin history.

You know, what makes up a city?

What is it that caused it to be established?

Who were the first settlers?

Another thing that I look at is the architecture.

I look at the architecture of the churches.

So I'll look at the structure of different churches when I

go to different parts of town, not just East Austin.

I look at, and I like looking at the cornerstone,

looking at the names of those individuals who sweated

and said, "Hey, we're going to form a church

"where we can worship."

And I love hearing the stories of a community.

And community is very important.

So we learned from mom and dad, that community is important and being involved is important.

Giving back is important.

So we learned that from mom and dad.

- [Interviewer] So this, the work that you did as historian, the passion was there.

- Yeah, oh yeah.

The seeds were planted.

- [Interviewer] Before, I mean obvious the change that's happening in the community.

So how's that amplified your efforts?

- The way, let me backtrack a little bit.

Mom and dad made sure we had our

own library on Black people and Black history

from when we were little.

Ordering stuff from the Weekly Reader.

I know, I don't know if you remember Weekly Reader.

You might not even of been born.

But the Weekly Reader, we'd order our books

on different Black celebrities,
historical figures.

So we had our own library.

And then also mom and dad
would order encyclopedias.

And then we bought books too.

And then Carver Library, my brother and I,

when we'd walk home from school,

we'd always stop there
and check out books.

And that way mama couldn't
give us a whipping

'cause we, you know, we went the library.

It was legit.

We weren't just roaming
around before we got home.

Now in terms of my interest being piqued

as I've gotten older and
with the changes in Austin,

it's even piqued more
because I want the story

to be told right.

Sometimes people,
whether they're newcomers

or old, you know, comers or old stayers,

whatever term you want to use,

I can't come up with the right word.

Sometimes people just get stuff wrong.

Sometimes people don't take time to say,

"Let me verify and check this
and talk to family members."

Let me read up on this
particular topic that I'm talking
about and make sure.

You got to verify information.

You even have to verify
information that's on the website
before you put publish it.

Just one slip of putting the wrong year
or people not caring about
spelling a person's name right.

People love their name
being spelled right.

People love their maiden
name being shared along
with their married name.

People want you to know who they were
before they got married to Mr. So and So.

People love sharing who
their mom and dad were,
who their grandparents were.

People want the story to be told accurate.

And so when I see people telling a story,
that's not their story and
they haven't taken time
to verify it and they're lazy.

And they're capturing the story,
the history, the narrative.

That's when I'm ready to kill somebody.

You know, if you going to tell my story,
check your information.

Talk to whoever that person's friends are.

Read up on what they did.

And then write it, let
it sit, then go back

and look it again and say,
"Okay, is the flow right?"

"Is the accuracy there?"

"Have I captured the essence
of who this person is?"

"Have I captured the essence
of what this school was about?"

"Or have I captured the essence
of what this church was like

"during the 1920s, thirties, and forties?"

"Have I captured the essence
of this particular section

"of East Austin, which
was across East Avenue

"now known as I-35?"

"Did I capture the essence

"and tell people that
there used to be a YWCA

"on east 11th Street near San
Marcos, the colored YWCA?"

All you see is that
little piece of the cement

with 800 whatever San Marcos.

The building's gone,

but that's where Black
girls stayed when they moved

to Austin and there was
no place for them to go.

They wanted to get established,
go to school or work.

But that was where they went to stay.

There was a colored YWCA.

- [Interviewer] You just
always dropping jewels.

- Yeah, but there was a colored Y.

And then couples met
at the housing center,

which is on Angelina.

It formally served as a clinic for people
to get checked out and also a daycare.

The house was donated by a
White lady named Mrs. Housing.

And she helped some Black
ladies who wanted a community

center in the neighborhood.

Now it did get sold probably
about three, four years ago.

A young White fella
bought it and he redid it.

You know, just fixing
it up as a home inside.

But the historical marker and everything.

He's kept the essence of what
looks like outside the same,

but it was sold some time ago.

The board members made
a decision to sell it.

But that was where I went to for 4-H Club
and for birthday parties.

So it was used for various purposes,
but it was a recreation center,
but that was also the USO Club
where Black couples met and courted.

The men in the military.

You know, they'd meet
their little ladies there.

It was a safe place.

So it served a purpose.

And there's information on
it at the History Center

on the houses.

- [Interviewer] So the Housing
Center Rosewood is another,

at the park.

Thinking about some of
the places that you went.

- Yeah, now I took swimming
lessons at Rosewood pool.

Mom would take my brother
and myself, Al Junior.

We'd walk from Cotton
Street, down Pennsylvania,

up the hill, down the hill to go swim.

That was 7:30 in the morning going to swim.

But Mr. Vernon Coleman, he's deceased now.

We lost him, I think last year, December.

And he was my swim teacher, very good teacher.

So those are my fond memories of Rosewood Park and Rosewood pool.

- [Interviewer] Wonderful.

So my last question for you is around what folks should know.

So people who are moving in.

- Yes.

- [Interviewer] To not, just central Austin, but thinking about, you know, where you live off MLK.

I'm imagining this from looking and the reality is this is another area that is being gentrified.

- Oh yes, it's being, oh yeah.

It is, it is.

- [Interviewer] So what do you feel folks should know who are coming into the community, especially with the intent of trying to become part of the community.

- They need to get involved
and they need to extend

and meet their neighbors.

The hard, there are
some that get involved.

Pardon me picking my nose,
ma'am, my nose itches.

But there are some who get involved

with the neighborhood association

and they do make sure
to meet their neighbors.

And it's beautiful, it is beautiful.

Then you have those, "Oh,
okay, we just coming in here.

"We going to buy this and
we're not talking to nobody."

The first thing they put up
is the fences and the walls.

They have their dogs, no children.

You know, the dog cannot
call 911 when you pass out

in the backyard or the front yard.

And because the fences are up,

nobody can see if you passed
out in the back, front yard

or the backyard so we can
call and get some help.

They don't want to be bothered.

We've extended from,
at my church, you know,

different activities.

They will come to the community activities if things are

on the grounds outside,
if we do our festivals,

if we do a community gathering,
whatever it is.

But as far as coming into the walls
of the sanctuary, they're not.

And some people are just unchurched.

So you just got to try and
reach them different ways.

But it would be beautiful to engage
because it's important that they know,
"Oh, okay, I'm coming into a territory
"that used to belong to somebody else.
"And I need to build relationship."

What I like is when, there
are some opportunities

that do come with all of this change.

I do love when folks
support Black businesses.

We need to make some of
the money that's going on.

I do love when the Republic
of Texas Schools come to town.

You know, there's, my folks
make some money in East Austin.

I do love when South by Southwest comes.

We need to get in on the

action a little bit more,
especially with the, what is it?
The BRB, whatever the term it is?

- [Interviewer] Airbnb?

- Airbnb, we need to be
in on the action on that.

We need to be in on the action on that
with Huston-Tillotson

and other places, other
churches with charging

for the parking when people come here
from South by Southwest.

That's some extra money
that's in the kitty

for those churches, for Huston-Tillotson,

even though the kids are
off during spring break,

they could be charging, you know,

and have some money coming
in as an extra resource.

But we need to be in on the
action and Black businesses.

And I love that when I go to Hoover's,

because of the closing of what's
the restaurant that closed

up there on Burnet road?

It was the last of the
Nighthawk restaurants.

It starts with an F or something, Frisco.

The Frisco died.

And so what I like is that
that caused the older elderly,

White folks who enjoyed the Frisco,
they came straight to Hoover's.

So they're coming across the
highway, across, you know,

Koenig Lane and all that.

And they said, "Oh,
we're going to Hoover's."

And it is beautiful.

So (inaudible) make some money.

So I love the business opportunities,

but I do hate that there's
some deficits in terms

of folks not saying, "Hey,
let's go check out this church."

And we are a integrated church at Wesley.

We have some Anglo brothers and sisters

and some Latino brothers and
sisters who do worship with us.

We've always been an integrated church

because we're United Methodist affiliated

with the United Methodist
church and Church of Christ.

But it would be beautiful to see that

because folks are getting
older, folks are dying.

And once that person dies,
that church pledge is gone.

So everybody, traditional churches are hurting right now 'cause everybody's going to the non-denominational churches.

- [Interviewer] Absolutely and someone I spoke with,

I interviewed a couple weeks ago was talking

about how, you know, a lot of the churches

on the east side now are these destination churches,

'cause no, a lot of people don't live in the community.

- Yeah, but it's a blessing folks have no problem

with coming cross town, from out of town,

what have you to worship with us.

And that is a gift from God,

'cause they do want to have that experience worshipping

at a Black church.

- [Interviewer] That's wonderful.

- Yes.

- [Interviewer] Well thank you.

Is there anything else that you want to share

that I may not have covered?

- Last thing I want to share.

One thing that we have

not been doing as a people
and I know some people do take care of it,
but it is critical that we,
as a race, when it comes
to our businesses, our legacies,
that we have a succession plan,
especially with Black businesses.

Because usually, when
Mama and Papa kick it

everybody say, "Hey man, we
don't have do this no more."

But even if you're not
able to leave the business

and even if you're not able
to train your own children,

'cause they don't want to do it,

have some folks that are willing to carry
on with the business.

So I'm a stickler about succession plans.

I'm a stickler about making sure

that the information is correct.

Making sure that something can live on.

I know that one thing I
have to do, I work for ACC.

I'm a continuing-ed instructor

and I know that I don't want my

two little classes to die once I do retire

from teaching the classes.

And so I need to be mentoring folks
and talk to my supervisor.

Say, "Hey, we need to get ready."

You know, we need to get ready.

And I want to train some
to teach my classes so

that this class will continue.

So those are the things that I look at.

And then also I'm youth
brigade coordinator

for Mr. Wyatt with the villager.

And I have been working for him since 2003

and it's been a blessing.

And I love working with the young people,

them becoming young reporters
and doing a beautiful job.

They do a lovely job.

But I want to be able to mentor
and train somebody to pick

up that football as well.

So that, that commitment,
that transition is smooth.

So that's the main thing
I'm not seeing happen.

Yeah.

- [Interviewer] Absolutely.

I was thinking about that
when you were talking how

important it is for folks to come along

and continue the work.

- But you got to train them

and you got to point out what's critical.

You got to point out customer service.

You got to point out being dependable.

You got to point out going the extra mile.

That is some, and the discipline.

That is something that is in you,

but you don't mind working at it.

You stick with it.

You don't do it halfway.

You do it 100%.

You do it 100%.

- [Interviewer] All right, thank you so much.

- Thank you.