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### Nicks, Carolyn-Oral History

Mijour Jones

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Oral History of Carolyn Nix, interviewed by Mijour Jones on 07/23/2018 in Huntington, West Virginia.

Mijour Jones: Hello, Ms. Carolyn.

Carolyn Nix: Hello.

Mijour Jones: So today I will be asking you about what it was like growing up in Huntington, West Virginia.

Carolyn Nix: Alright.

Mijour Jones: So where were you – were you born in Huntington?

Carolyn Nix: Yes, I was born in Huntington, West Virginia at C & O Hospital.

Mijour Jones: Were there lots of hospitals?

Carolyn Nix: There was three main hospitals: St. Mary's, Cabell, and C & O.

Mijour Jones: Were they optional to African American people?

Carolyn Nix: Yes.

Mijour Jones: What street did you grow up on?

Carolyn Nix: I grew up on 9th Avenue and 19th Street.

Mijour Jones: Did you have lots of friends in your neighborhood?

Carolyn Nix: Yes, I had lots of friends in the neighborhood and I have a lot of friends now.

Mijour Jones: Was your family an open family who knew everybody in your neighborhood?

Carolyn Nix: Yes. They were truly an open family. It was just like I spend the night over somebody's, they spend the night at my house. We went to parties, little parties and stuff. I had a good time growin' up.

Mijour Jones: What's your fondest memory of living here?

Carolyn Nix: My grandsons. They play for DC Express, my oldest grandsons. Then they started comin' – my great-grandsons is out there now. I have a cheerleader out there. I had a cheerleader then. It's been a good time for me to watch my grandbabies.

Mijour Jones: Describe the neighborhood the way it was when you were young.

Carolyn Nix: Green, beautiful, neat, and clean. They kept their yards – trash, everything was just perfect in the yards. Flowers, everything.

Mijour Jones: Tell me about your parents or your family background.

Carolyn Nix: They come from Greenville, South Carolina. There wasn't too many jobs there, so him and her came this way. And then they had my mom and my aunt, and then me – I mean, then us.

Mijour Jones: What was your parents' religious background?

Carolyn Nix: My grandparents' religious background was Baptist, and my mother's was Baptist, and mine, too.

Mijour Jones: Okay. Was there any specific churches that y'all went to?

Carolyn Nix: Young's Chapel A.M.E Church on Artisan Avenue. My sisters attend that, and then my grandfather and them attended 16th Street Baptist Church.

Mijour Jones: Okay, so what other relatives did you have contact with growing up?

Carolyn Nix: Both aunts, sisters, brothers, all of it.

Mijour Jones: What do you remember about your grandparents?

Carolyn Nix: I remember my grandparents were very loving people. Very church – wanted you to do the right thing. It was a nice home to live in. Very nice.

Mijour Jones: What makes you say that?

Carolyn Nix: It makes me say that because my grandmother cared about everybody. If you couldn't afford to get your hair done, she would do your hair. My mother would curl it. My grandfather went out and cut elderly people's grass and flowers and cleaned their yards, and cleaned their porches for 'em. You know, just to have something to do for the people.

Mijour Jones: What was one of your fondest memories living here in the 1950s?

Carolyn Nix: I don't remember too much about the 1950s 'cause I was born in 1951. I remember it was a lot of prejudice, a lot of anti-war. Space – people goin' up in space. I really haven't felt too much animosity between blacks and whites until the late '60s. That's when I found out things wasn't right.

Mijour Jones: How was that different from the 1970s or 1980s?

Carolyn Nix: They were more faster. Things were slower in 1950, 1960. It was alright to live in. I especially liked goin' to see colleges and different stuff and people doin' different things. We used to take trips traveling to go to different colleges to see what was really goin' on, for us to want to choose which college we wanted to go to.

Mijour Jones: What was school like?

Carolyn Nix: School was a good time for us, because the people that you went to school with, or junior high school with and high school with, is who you graduated with. They were friends to the end and they still friends. What are you laughin' at?

Mijour Jones: What – never mind, I don't even –

Carolyn Nix: What? I was –

[Interview re-recorded on different day]

Mijour Jones: Hello, Ms. Carolyn.

Carolyn Nix: Hello.

Mijour Jones: How has your day been?

Carolyn Nix: Very well.

Mijour Jones: Today I will be asking you questions about where you were born and what was it like growing up. First question: Were you born in Huntington, West Virginia?

Carolyn Nix: Yes, I was born in Huntington, West Virginia at C & O Railroad Hospital.

Mijour Jones: What street did you grow up on?

Carolyn Nix: 9th Avenue and 19th Street.

Mijour Jones: Were there many people that lived around you?

Carolyn Nix: Yeah, we had a loving community. Everybody helped each other. They grew flowers. We did everything as kids.

Mijour Jones: Was your family fond in your neighborhood?

Carolyn Nix: Yes, very fond. Still is.

Mijour Jones: Describe the neighborhood the way it was when you were young.

Carolyn Nix: Well, you're gonna wake up in the morning and it'd be sun shinin' and the block be so clean. You could smell ham and bacon and eggs and things when you wake up, all way around. I played with people next door. We wasn't allowed to go too far, but we had a nice community of people that we played with.

Mijour Jones: Can you describe the energy or rhythm of the people on 8th Avenue and Fairland?

Carolyn Nix: I don't know too much about them that was on 8th Avenue 'cause we wasn't allowed to go on 8th Avenue from 9th Avenue until we got grown. So I don't know what they was doin'.

Mijour Jones: Where was your family originally from?

Carolyn Nix: Greenville, South Carolina.

Mijour Jones: What made your family come to West Virginia?

Carolyn Nix: Shortness of work. He came to Huntington to visit some people and got a job at C & O Railroad and went back and got my grandmother and my mother.

Mijour Jones: What do you remember about your grandparents?

Carolyn Nix: I remember somebody always there. I remember somebody that always was there when things was down and things was up. I remember somebody telling me, "Let's go buy a new pair of shoes." My grandparents was my life. My mom was there, but my grandparents took care of us. You seen that I had – you seen about my music. He wanted to do everything to help me. All of 'em. It's [inaudible 00:09:15].

Mijour Jones: Did you have a lot of friends growing up?

Carolyn Nix: Yeah, I still have the same friends. Some of 'em died, but I still have the same friends that I started out with in the first grade.

Mijour Jones: What's one of your fondest memories living here in the 1950s?

Carolyn Nix: I don't know too much that was going on in 1950 because I was born in 1951, but all I remember is the space and, I don't remember too much about then because I – I mean I wasn't around.

Mijour Jones: How was that different from the 1970s or 1980s?

Carolyn Nix: [Laughter] 1980s and '70s was like hippie. That's the way I remember it. Hippies. Everybody wanted to be a hippie or didn't nobody want to be tied down. That was just the frame of the situation where everybody wanted to have their own voice, okay? And you can't have a voice unless you find yourself. So, that's where I found my voice at.

Mijour Jones: Describe a time when you felt most proud of someone in your family.

Carolyn Nix: I'm proud of my grandsons and my granddaughters for making the DC cheerleading squad and the DC football team. I wish they could have went further.

Mijour Jones: Describe the house you grew up in.

Carolyn Nix: I grew up in a two story, three – four bedroom home. It was nice. Big front yard, flowers everywhere. My granddaddy sang. Yard neatly cut. Back yard, he used to grow vegetables. I remember a whole much. I remember when they'd go fishing and go bring fish back. [Laughter] I was scared to death, but he did a lot. I mean, I seen a lot that my grandfather and my grandmother did.

Mijour Jones: What was your room like?

Carolyn Nix: Who?

Mijour Jones: What was your room like?

Carolyn Nix: Huh?

Mijour Jones: What was your room like?

Carolyn Nix: I had a big room. Double beds, twin beds; so did my sisters and my brother. So everybody had a very nice room. My grandfather made nice money and he took very good care, good care.

Mijour Jones: How many children were in the family?

Carolyn Nix: Four.

Mijour Jones: Where were you in the lineup?

Carolyn Nix: I was second in lineup.

Mijour Jones: What were your duties around the house as a child?

Carolyn Nix: Clean your room. Make sure the dishes was washed. Help cook. Keep the front yards and stuff clean. You know, just regular everyday things.

Mijour Jones: When did you learn to cook?

Carolyn Nix: When? When I was seven.

Mijour Jones: Who taught you?

Carolyn Nix: My grandmother.

Mijour Jones: Was it fun, or –

Carolyn Nix: Yes, to smell hot rolls risin', makin' rolls from flour. My grandmother could make anything.

Mijour Jones: What was the first thing you cooked on your own?

Carolyn Nix: Fried chicken.

Mijour Jones: Were there any family recipes that –

Carolyn Nix: Homemade macaroni and cheese, and there's one thing that I really love cookin' is turkey and dressing.

Mijour Jones: Do you still cook as much today?

Carolyn Nix: I don't cook as much today as I did back then with my kids because my health is bad, but I still cook.

Mijour Jones: What was school like here?

Carolyn Nix: It was hard for me at first because I was kinda big and I didn't understand the borderlines of big, small, medium, but when you make friends and you're in a school, and you make friends, you have true friends. No name calling and no – I've been through all of that and that's not what I like at all. So school was all right because the people that I started with is the people that I graduated with.

Mijour Jones: Did you have any best friends?

Carolyn Nix: Yeah. I have two best friends. Three best friends. Two of 'em died.

Mijour Jones: Describe what your siblings were like.

Carolyn Nix: One was bossy. Aaron's crazy. I'm mean, and Lele's sensitive.

Mijour Jones: Why would you say that?

Carolyn Nix: She might used to take sides, but she would always end up on my side. That's what I liked about her.

Mijour Jones: Who was your favorite?

Carolyn Nix: I had no favorite. All of them were my favorite. All three of 'em.

Mijour Jones: What did you do on Christmas, Thanksgiving, birthdays, other holidays?

Carolyn Nix: I spent 'em with my kids. I spend 'em with my grandchildren, my great-grandchildren, my nieces and my nephews. We cook and eat. That's the happy time. The happy time is with us being together, including my oldest son whenever he comes, but that's my most exciting time is the holidays.

Mijour Jones: Do you remember any times when money was tight?

Carolyn Nix: [Laughter] Plenty. It was hard, but I had a boyfriend that helped me every step of the way.

Mijour Jones: Do you remember having to do without things you wanted or needed?

Carolyn Nix: Yeah. It was hard. It was hard because I didn't have anybody to help me. I had to take the little money that I got for my children to pay rent and do for 'em and try to buy clothes and it was hard. People don't understand hardness – you goin' without. Sometimes you go without eating to see that your children ate. I have four kids. I have a oldest son, I have – I have Chris, I have Eric, I have Anthony, and I have Andrea, and those four has been my life ever since the day that they were born.

Mijour Jones: What schools did you go to?

Carolyn Nix: I went to Barnett. Then I went to Simms. Then I went to Lincoln Junior High School and then Huntington High. I graduated from Huntington High and I went to Marshall right here.

Mijour Jones: Which one was your favorite?

Carolyn Nix: Huntington High.

Mijour Jones: What makes you say that?

Carolyn Nix: Because of my music. I've been singing ever since I was three years old and I just loved music. I loved to sing and that's what I did.

Mijour Jones: What were your parents' political beliefs?

Carolyn Nix: Republican. Republican. Republican. I take that lie back. Democrat. [Laughter]

Mijour Jones: Why?

Carolyn Nix: Because my granddaddy was Republican and my grandmother was a Democrat. [Laughter]

Mijour Jones: What story did you hear about all your ancestors?

Carolyn Nix: I just heard that we were from Africa and I really haven't chased it down like I should have, but it didn't make any difference.

Mijour Jones: What did people do for fun when you were younger?

Carolyn Nix: We had little parties and most of the time go to Sunday school and church. That was fun.

Mijour Jones: What was your favorite place to eat?



Carolyn Nix: We didn't eat out. We never ate out when we were young. We always ate at home. We never went to dinner nowhere other than, you know, church dinner or somethin' like that. Other than that, no.

Mijour Jones: Was it that your family didn't like to, or –

Carolyn Nix: They were more on the quiet side. They didn't associate with a lot of people. The people around us and, you know, our neighbors and the people that we care about, yeah, but they were to themselves a lot. My sister is like that now, Lele.

Mijour Jones: What was your favorite place to shop growing up?

Carolyn Nix: Huntington Store.

Mijour Jones: Can you tell me about the Huntington Store?

Carolyn Nix: Huntington Store was the big department store and some people had bills and stuff. They pay cash and you go get anything you want and I loved that. The Huntington Store, the Style Shop, and Four Norwoods. Them three shops right there.

Mijour Jones: Where were they at?

Carolyn Nix: Downtown. But they're gone now.

Mijour Jones: Where the movies and stuff are? [Silence] So, was the Huntington Store like a smaller mall?

Carolyn Nix: Yeah, but it was a store. It was maybe about three floors, three or four floors, and it had clothes and shoes, and dishtowels – everything that you wanted there. Buy expensive dresses and coats and pocketbooks and things. Yeah, I wanted to shop there all the time. I loved to go shopping.

Mijour Jones: What was your clothing style growing up?

Carolyn Nix: I basically loved dresses. I wore pants, but I loved dresses. I loved skirts and sweaters. That was my perfect style then 'cause I – back then I had skirts and sweaters that matched, so I loved that.

Mijour Jones: Can you tell me about race in Huntington?

Carolyn Nix: The first time that I really went through that was we was goin' to school one day. It had just started (Lincoln) and these people was sittin' on the porch. We are taught to say, "Good morning," "Good afternoon" to everyone. That was my grandmother and them's thing for us. And on the way to school, these people was on the porch and they called us niggers. Well I had never been through that because we were crossin' from 20th Street goin' to 21st Street to Lincoln Junior High School and they were really prejudiced down that way. And I lived a block from 'em and had to go through it. A lot of them people

knew me and their people. You know, it was – it was a bad time for us. I didn't like being called out of my name and stuff.

Mijour Jones: Was it segregated?

Carolyn Nix: No, not really.

Mijour Jones: Where did people go on dates?

Carolyn Nix: I don't know 'cause we didn't go on none.

Mijour Jones: How did duties break down by gender – household duties?

Carolyn Nix: The older you are is the more that you do. Me and Wilma did most of it because Aaron and Lele was little and as they grew, he cleaned his room, she cleaned her room, I cleaned my room, and Wilma cleaned her room. So everybody worked together. My grandparents, they cleaned their room and then you had to go downstairs to clean the bathroom. It's just things that automatically falls on you. If you're told to do this, then that's what you do.

Mijour Jones: So did you garden when you were younger, or –

Carolyn Nix: Garden? No.

Mijour Jones: Did anybody in your family?

Carolyn Nix: My grandfather.

Mijour Jones: Can you give me an example of that?

Carolyn Nix: Of him gardening? He loved flowers. He loved greens. He would grow greens out the ground. He'd water tomatoes. Anything that you name. Plums. My grandfather was brilliant at doin' things with the soil.

Mijour Jones: Did you have expensive stuff?

Carolyn Nix: We wasn't poor, but we wasn't rich. What we wanted, we mostly got. You know what I'm sayin'? And I learned how to babysit and make my money. I would babysit in the evenin' for my mom's friend and I would make money and I would take that money and buy clothes and stuff with it – what I wanted, okay? I didn't need for nothin' – my grandfather and them provided everything that I needed.

Mijour Jones: What was your favorite thing to do growing up, out of everything?

Carolyn Nix: Sing.

Mijour Jones: Why was that?

Carolyn Nix: It's just, it's just dear to my heart. I've been singin' ever since I was two, three years old.

Mijour Jones: Do you still sing?

Carolyn Nix: Yeah.

Mijour Jones: That's all I have for today.

Carolyn Nix: All right. Thank you.

Mijour Jones: Thank you.