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School Hill Audio File 00003

School Hill Oral History Collection
Interview of Florine Lane-Henderson, May 20, 2017
Interviewed by: Chris Kelley
Transcribed by: David Cardillo

[00:00]

Mr. Kelley: All right. So, my first question's a pretty simple one. This is Chris Kelley. Saturday, May 20th, 2017. I'm here for the New London Road School Hill Community Oral History Project. Could I get you to say your name and spell it? Both your first and last.

Ms. Lane-Henderson: Yes. I am Florine F-L-O-R-I-N-E Lane-Henderson. L-A-N-E-dash-H-E-N-D-E-R-S-O-N.

Mr. Kelley: Excellent, thank you. Your date and place of birth.

Ms. Lane-Henderson: 02-27-52 is the day, and I was born in Wilmington, Delaware, because there was no hospital in Newark, Delaware, at that time.

Mr. Kelley: Very interesting. If, could you share your occupation?

Ms. Lane-Henderson: I am retired. I'm retired from the University of Delaware. I worked thirty-odd years - thirty-two, thirty-something years - in the Admission's Office.

Mr. Kelley: Okay. Excellent. So, you did share with where you were born. Where are you located presently?

Ms. Lane-Henderson: I still live in Newark. Not in the City of Newark, but I live off of Route 4 in Newark.

Mr. Kelley: Okay. Excellent. So, this is pretty obvious to me, but the next prompt is your connection to the school and the community.

Ms. Lane-Henderson: I grew up in Newark and always thought that I would be a student at the New London School. But I was in the first class to integrate Newark's special school district, so I went to school at Medill School. However, I feel as though I went to New London School because I was always here. I went to school in 1956, and at that time, the school was sort of, the school as well as the church, was like the center of the community. So if there was something going on at church, everyone was there. If there was something going on at School Hill, everyone was there. The community supported the school in every, every way. The teachers, I hear, I don't know this, but I

hear that the teachers were wonderful. They went to your home, they talked to your parents if you got into trouble. I mean, they took a personal interest in every single student. And so if the school had a Christmas program, it wouldn't be that just a few people came. The whole, entire community supported the Christmas program that went on here. I can remember, I lived on New London Road. I lived at 109 New London Road, and I was an only child. But my father was one of seventeen children, so I had cousins everywhere you looked. And I had a cousin who was much older than me, and I can remember being so excited because he would come just before the program. First of all, he would come and say, "I'm going to come and I'm going to take Florine to School Hill for the Christmas program." And my Mom would dress me up and I would have my snow boots and everything on, and we would walk up New London Road to School Hill for the Christmas program and it was just the most wonderful experience ever. It would be cold, but everybody would be walking up to this program. And then when you got here, it would be a phenomenal experience to see the talent and the community, you know, children reciting poems about Christmas and singing songs, and everybody being together. It was just really a wonderful experience. So I feel that the other thing that I'd like to share is that my mother worked all the time, so I stayed with a lady named Mildred Tucker. [05:00] And so her children went to this school. And so when they came home from school, they would come home with work and so they would share that work with me. So when I actually went to school, I knew how to do so many things academically because they challenged me. Okay, write your name. Write your ABCs. Do this mathematical problem or that mathematical problem. And so it really was an awesome experience to be part of this community. It was a time when everyone lived together, everyone knew each other. and I'm not saying we didn't have our problems, but there was a love here that I have never felt in any other community that I lived in. And it's because of that experience that I've tried to raise my children. I wanted them to feel the same kind of love that I experienced as a child, but I don't know if I really succeeded because I needed that... It takes a village, they say that it takes a village to raise a child, and I needed that village. But I always felt that we were in an isolated place, and we never got that real embrace. We got it in church, but in the day-to-day, you know, coming out my front door and having a neighbor come down and play hopscotch or jump rope or Chinese jump rope... We didn't have that. I couldn't give them that. So, before I start really bawling, we'd better move on to another subject.

Mr. Kelley:

Well, actually, we are in the basement here right now, and you told me, before we started the interview, that there is something special. We're actually in where they do their art studio here today. But you said you had a kind of a special connection over this room, brought back a specific memory. Can you share that with us?

Ms. Lane-Henderson: Yeah. This room... When we would have Parks and Rec here at school Hill, it was this room was the room where once a week we were permitted to come inside the building, and I hope I get this in sequence, that the entire top floor in every other room in the building was closed. It was virtually condemned. But they allowed us to come into this room once a week, and we would have like a little record player with 45s, and we would spin records and we would dance the afternoon away. And it was so much fun. This looks like such a tiny space now.

Mr. Kelley: Yeah, it does.

Ms. Lane-Henderson: But honestly, every kid from the community. I could go upstairs right now and get some kids that did some dancing in this room. I mean, we had so much fun. I can't begin to tell you. The friends that I met during playground time are friends that I have kept for a lifetime. My best friends... One lives in Ohio now, Lucia (phonetic [09:10]), and my other friend Vanessa lives in Greensboro, North Carolina now. But we met out in the sandbox. So, and I can go upstairs right now and get Ray Bias (phonetic [09:26]) and Sandy Marrow and Doctor Williams, and we could tell some stories about this room. Because, and you know, it would be like ninety-five degrees in the shade, and we would walk twice a day. In the morning, we would walk up the hill for school ground, and we'd walk home for lunch, and we'd walk in the heat of the day up the hill for school ground. [10:00] And we played ball and we would play kickball, baseball, we'd run races, we'd play volleyball, we played checkers. At school ground, we did it all, right here. And, I don't know, this room, right now, just imagining how hot it was outside. There was no air conditioning in this building. So we would open that door. Everybody would enter, but this room would be cool because it's all cement and it would be cooler than it was outside, but we would have, like, the time of our lives. I will never forget the time that we spent in this room dancing. Oh my God, dancing, dancing, learning every new move, and just having a ball. So, yeah, that's why I wanted to do it in this room. I can't remember if that sink was... I don't think that sink was there.

Mr. Kelley: Yeah, I don't...

Ms. Lane-Henderson: Because the only way that we could drink, we could get a drink on a hot day like it was, there were no bottled waters in those days. The only way that you could get a drink was a hose that was hooked up outside and we could get a drink from the hose. And we couldn't do it all the time. It would be certain times of the day you could line up and get a drink from the hose. But, it was all good. Every bit of it was good.

Mr. Kelley: That's awesome. You have a great memory. That's awesome.

Ms. Lane-Henderson: Yeah.

Mr. Kelley: I was going to say, this room is pretty cool right now, actually. Compared to the other rooms.

Ms. Lane-Henderson: Yeah. With the water. I mean, I'm a little nervous, but with the water, it's relaxing me.

Mr. Kelley: Yeah, I know.

Ms. Lane-Henderson: It really is.

Mr. Kelley: Yeah. So, we kind of talked a little bit about this, but could you share a typical day that would include the school? I know you mentioned different activities and stuff like that. But is there any, like, kind of schedule or typical day that might revolve around coming here for you?

Ms. Lane-Henderson: Well, on a typical day for me at the school would be a day when school was out and all the children in the community were home from school and we would have breakfast and we would wait on our porches or, you know, on our steps until it was time to walk to School Hill, and you would see the little trickle. There would be the kids that were furthest away, they would come first, and they would start walking, and then you would just see a trickling of kids just walking up the hill. And they would come through the hedges. There were hedges. I don't know if those hedges are still out front. But we would come through the hedges and you would see all of your friends and we might be a little bit sleepy, but we'd sit at the picnic table and eventually we'd get out, you know, Chinese checkers or regular checkers, there were people playing spades, and, you know, all kinds of pinochle, all kinds of card games. And then there'd be kids playing in the sandbox, there would be... I don't think we had... Did we have a basketball court? I think there might have been a basketball hoop, but it was dirty. You know? There would be dust mounting up from the basketball hoop. But there was no pool. There was no pool up here. And we needed one desperately, and that's why George Wilson, in every house that he ever built, he had a pool. So Uncle Inky (phonetic [14:07]), once we left School Hill for the day, we would go to Uncle Inky's pool, and we would swim. And he had a light in his pool, so we would swim until ten at night, and then we'd walk down the hill and take our bath and get into bed. But we all did it together. We all did it together, and that was the best part of it. I remember the best day would be the day, the last day of having a playground for the summer. The city would take us to Rittenhouse Park, which is out 896 that way, and we would have a bus come to take us. And you could swim at Rittenhouse Park. This was the only day that we would go swimming. [15:00] With the playground. And we would have all these races and games and the New London playground would win the prize, first place, from any park anywhere in Newark because we had all the great

athletes and everything here. So, it was a good thing. And we would have lunch there, hamburgers and hot dogs. It was just a great day. You know? We just look forward to it. And it would be just before you go back to school, so it would be like a treat for us. Yeah, that's probably my favorite day.

Mr. Kelley: Awesome. Very cool. Another question we've been asking everyone is, "Altogether, what stands out the most in your mind about the community or the school?" Just in general. I know that you already kind of touched on some things, but, with that prompt...

Ms. Lane-Henderson: Like I said, the experience that the love that I experienced in this community, I have never experienced anywhere. I was married to someone who was in the military, and so we traveled all over. And I've lived in a number of places and never have I ever experienced the kind of love that I experienced here in Newark, Delaware. There are no words that come to my mind that can really explain it. When I moved back to Delaware, I think my kids were going to the first grade, maybe. And so I tried to create, I thought I was bringing them back and that they would experience all the things that I had experienced as a child here. But we didn't actually live near this community. And so, I can remember when they were like, eight and nine, or, yeah, about eight and nine, I would go home from the University, my job at the University. At lunch time, I would drive home, I would get them, and I would bring them to George Wilson Center for the playground because I wanted them to have a similar experience to the one that I had had. It was a little bit different then because they couldn't walk down the hill with their friends and all that kind of stuff. But I think that if my daughter, who's upstairs, would come down and talk about it, I think that she has fond memories, too. I think that they were glad that I connected them in that way. That I took the time to connect them to the community where my Dad and I were generations... I think it's time for me to end this.

Mr. Kelley: Yeah. Okay. Thank you so much. What you've given us is awesome. And no worries at all. No pressure.

Ms. Lane-Henderson: I think I'm going to get very emotional, so I think I need to stop.

Mr. Kelley: Okay. No worries at all.

[End 18:59]