

**The Lemon Street Schools Oral History Collection
Marietta City Schools System, 2019-2021
Pearl Freeman interview
Conducted by James Newberry
February 6, 2020**

Complete Transcript

Interviewer: Okay. This is James Newberry and I'm here with Miss Pearl Freeman on Thursday, February 6, 2020 at her home in Marietta. And Miss Freeman, I want to thank you for allowing me to sit down with you today. Do you agree to this interview?

Freeman: Absolutely.

Interviewer: Thanks so much. Could you tell me your full name?

Freeman: My full name is Willy Pearl Riley Freeman.

Interviewer: And what's your birthday?

Freeman: 6/15/48.

Interviewer: Where did you grow up?

Freeman: Here in Marietta, Georgia. 618 Wright street.

Interviewer: Tell me your parents' names.

Freeman: My mother's name was Pearlie May Martin Foster, Walker Foster was my stepfather and Grant Riley was my biological father.

Interviewer: So, what did your parents do for a living?

Freeman: My mother was a homemaker and my dad was a concrete worker. Both of them basically did concrete work.

Interviewer: And you mentioned that your mother did work at Lockheed.

Freeman: She worked for ... Actually ARA was the food service out of Lockheed and she worked there 36 years. In the bakery.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you have siblings?

Freeman: I do. My one brother Johnny Martin and one sister Clara Foster. Yes.

Interviewer: So, you mentioned Wright street. Can you tell me what that part of the city is called?

Freeman: It was called Louisville.

Interviewer: Okay.

Freeman: Yeah. Wright was called Louisville.

Interviewer: And at that time when you were very young as a child, what was life like in your community there in Louisville?

Freeman: That's funny that you ask. I don't remember us having a lot. We didn't have what you call a park and recreation area. It was just like a wide open field and there were swings down there. We played baseball down there. Cafe's was on one end of Maple street and basically it was just a community that we just kind of went from house to house and played. It was funny, when I was a child when I heard the word ghetto I didn't know what it meant. I didn't know that we were classed as living below the poverty level because we ate every day and we lived in a house and we weren't in the projects.

Interviewer: Did you hear that word when you were a child?

Freeman: I did but I didn't know what it meant.

Interviewer: And who would you hear it from?

Freeman: Just people talking. I remember in the late '50s, probably when I began to notice urban renewal was going to come through and all you heard then was they were going to take the black people's houses. So blacks were being displaced and they were just going all over Marietta. My mother was just smart enough to take what she got out of her house and she built us a little house out on Chester Hill road in Marietta.

Interviewer: What age were you at that point?

Freeman: I think I was about 12 years old when we moved because I remember my 13th birthday party we had it at Chester Hill road.

Interviewer: Do you remember any significant changes in your life, in your daily routine after that move?

Freeman: You know, I don't. Back then I'm in school. Even though school buses ran, my mother always carried us to school in her car. And she would probably ... I don't remember if she had a cab to pick us up. But when we moved to Chester Hill road, I do remember riding the bus back home back in those days. But no, I don't think I noticed or suffered a lot of change because I was always active in

school. I was in everything and I was always kind of a carefree person. I never got caught up in a lot of the hoopla and stuff that was going on. You just hear the older people talking about discrimination and racism but as a child that may not necessarily have meant anything to you. It was just adult talk.

Interviewer: You've talked a good bit about your mother. Can you describe the type of woman she was, her personality?

Freeman: My mother was probably one of the strongest women I know. She had three of us and I can remember one time, one point in her life, she worked three jobs in one day just to make it. She worked for a man named Mr. Ward Watkin at that time. And when she would go to work, she would carry us. He had a daughter named Nancy. I remember one of them. And we would ride their horses and just have fun. And if she need be, she'd have a cab to pick us up to take us where we needed to go. And mom just worked real hard and worked in the church and tried to provide the best living that she could for her children.

Interviewer: What church?

Freeman: She went to Wright Street Baptist Church. We lived right next door to the church as a matter of fact. Yeah.

Interviewer: And is that where you went all through your childhood years?

Freeman: Until we were displaced. I believe we moved to Chester Hill Road in 1962. '61, '62. And then when we had to move ... That's when we moved out to Chester Hill Road.

Interviewer: Did you go to a different church at that point?

Freeman: No.

Interviewer: Stayed there.

Freeman: She died in 1989 and she was still a member of Wright Street. I wasn't. I left there when I got married in 1966.

Interviewer: And went where, what church?

Freeman: Grady Community Church of God and Christ on 406 Roswell Street. Back then it was called Avery Street. Again, a renewal came through and Avery Street had to be relocated and they went what you call Baptist Town. So the church was relocated over to the corner of ... At that time it was called Page Street, now it's called Marietta Parkway. And now the church is not there anymore. They've torn it down since that time. So that group of people, we left and we moved to 406 Roswell Street. So now we're known as Grady Community Church of God and Christ.

Interviewer: I see. And your mother, what did she want for her children? Did she ever voice that, her expectations?

Freeman: She would always tell us, I want you all to have a better life than what I have. And for my sister and I, if we were disobedient, we got whippings and she would always tell us, "I want you all to be the best wives you can be. I discipline you because you need to know how to do this, that and the other." And one of her favorite sayings to us was, "Your word is your bond, that's all you have. So do what you say you're going to do and mean what you say." That was very strong with her. Keep your word. She was a disciplinarian, she didn't believe in being late, she believed in getting there before time or absolutely on time. She was something. Very comical. The things that she would say would just be so funny. But she was just ... Mom was just ... She was a good person.

Interviewer: Well tell me about your early education. Where did you start school?

Freeman: I started school on Lemon Street. First grade elementary. And I stayed at Lemon street until they built the school in Louisville. I think they called it Wright Street. And I think I went to school there for a year. And I don't remember if the class changed or what happened, but I only remember going over there maybe a year. By then of course urban renewal has come through and all that's torn down and the school is build. And I can't remember what year that was, but I do remember going there, I know for a year. Then I went back to Lemon Street to high school. Of course because back in those days, Lemon Street was the only black high school that we had. Kids were bused in from Kennesaw, Acworth, Smyrna, Powder Springs, from everywhere because that was where we had to go.

Interviewer: And you mentioned your mother dropping you off usually. Did you ever carpool as you got older? How did that change?

Freeman: No, we never did carpool. Mom always carried us. My cousin who is deceased now, Tommy Zachery. When Tommy turned 16, he got a car and we would ride back and forth to school with him or at least ride back in the evenings with him from school. But my mom always carried us to school. If I got on the bus it was because I chose to.

Interviewer: Okay. Okay, so let's go back to Lemon Street Elementary. This was still a fairly new school, built in '51?

Freeman: Yeah it was. Excuse me, I don't know what year it was build, but I know I started first grade there and I was born in '48. So I started first grade there and we used to go to the lunch room. I remember Mother Porter. We called her Mother Porter. Mrs. Porter, Mrs. Wise, people that worked in the lunch room. And I remember when they build the annex part back in the back of the elementary school. And that's where we went until ... You went there until you were in high

school and that's when you went across the street once you went into the ninth grade.

Interviewer: Okay. So, I've been in the building once so I'm familiar with the layout but I'd love for you to talk a little bit about the layout of the school. Where the administrators were, everything as you remember it.

Freeman: When you walk in the front door, to the left was the principal's office. And at that time Mr. Woods was our principal. And then over to the right was the library. And then as you go down the hall it was just different classrooms for different teachers on both sides. And then there was ... As you go down the hall on the left side, there was a girl and boy's bathroom and then classrooms all the way down until you got to the end. When you got to the end of the building and you went out, that's when you went into the annex. The long part that I think they're either tearing it down now or they've torn it down.

Interviewer: Right.

Freeman: Yeah. But the lunch room, if you took the left hall and went down. Because there was an opening, classrooms were down through there also. And all the way down there was just classrooms on each side. And then at the very end was the lunch room.

Interviewer: Did you take your lunch?

Freeman: No. No we didn't take lunch. I ate lunch at school.

Interviewer: Do you remember what was served?

Freeman: Sure. We had stuff like ... The rolls was always delicious. At least you thought so. We might would have maybe pork and beans and maybe hotdogs or sometimes maybe a sandwich. I don't remember chicken or anything like that. That's about all I remember with the food. But yeah, we had lunch at school. I did anyway. And back then, I can remember I think your parents had to ... I don't know if we had to pay for the lunches. Seems like we did because seemed like some kids were on a program whereby if they couldn't pay they could get on a certain kind of ... Now they call it the Pell and all that kind of stuff. But I don't remember that. I ate lunch at school.

Interviewer: Yeah you mentioned some students not being able to pay. Did you notice or observe differences in class among your fellow students?

Freeman: You know what, I didn't. I didn't because back then to me teachers ... It was more than about education. They also tried to give you life skills. Things that would help you even when you left school, even in an early age. I remember in our health class. We had a class back then. Was in the health class and they would teach you more about your physical, your hygiene, and things that would

help you as you migrate through life that maybe some kids weren't getting at home. I don't remember running into kids that seemed to have thought they were better or there was any inequities. I could remember when we would open up our school book sometimes and we would see that the school books was already written in or somebody's name was in them. And that's when I remember learning that ... Okay, so we got the hand me down from the white school. These were not new books. I don't remember us ... Very rarely we got new books. They were from ... Leftover.

Interviewer: Did you say, okay, well, let's use them, whatever, or did you think well that's ... How did you feel about that?

Freeman: James, you know what, I don't know that I understood racism as being such a negative. It's just whatever the teacher presented to you, you learned it. And I don't remember hearing them be disgusted that our children got the hand me downs. That might have been the talk among the adults but we didn't get it. I was always such a ... My opinion of me was a happy go lucky kid that got along with everybody, whether they were white, black. I just don't remember getting into all of that. So I didn't know how to feel different about it. When I probably really came into ... I knew that there were differences. I knew that we could not just go to any store or go to any games. And I remember when my cousin Tommy had a friend. They lived ... Chester Hill Road was ... Back then there was sort of affluent people began to move over there. And Tommy had a friend whose father was a doctor. And they were just a very ... He was white and they were the very best of friends. And I can remember when that young man ... I don't remember his name nor his parents' name. But I can remember when he got so angry with his father and he made this comment like, you taught us to think that we were better than anybody else. And so that was like, oh wow. Something is really wrong. But here again, I never got in a fight with white kids. I never wanted to hurt anybody. I'm a kind of person, I have to bring closure to things or try to rationalize and figure it out and then move on and then understand that we're just different. And if it don't work, it just didn't work. A lot of people didn't take that same position. So it was different but it didn't rest on me like that. I knew my limits, I knew my boundaries. My mother was protective of us. Like I said, she worked for white people that seemed to have cared for her and they accepted her children. Because my sister and I played a many days with Mr. Watkins' children. So you know, I don't know.

Interviewer: What kind of a student were you academically?

Freeman: Academically, I think I could have been better. Played around a lot, probably could have been an A-B student, but I was probably a B-C.

Interviewer: What were you thinking down the road like as you progressed through your grades? What were you thinking after high school?

Freeman: I didn't know. I didn't know what I ... All my life, I wanted to be a nurse. All I ever wanted to do was take care of people. And I don't know where I developed that

from. I still do at 71 years old. I still try to help take care of people. But some kind of way I ended up in the business world. But I was going to go to school. That's what I said. I was going to go to school and I wanted to be a registered nurse and I wanted to work in the hospital. So my first real job was ... Back then they called them nurse's assistants or nurse's aid. So I was the nurse's aid when I was like 15, 16 at Kennestone Hospital. Back then they had what they call a G Section. And G section was for colored only. And they would take you to surgery, do the surgery whatever, but they brought you back to where we were separated.

Interviewer: And was it like an all black staff in G Section as well?

Freeman: Yes sir, yes sir.

Interviewer: So, there was no white staff in G Section?

Freeman: It was white doctors.

Interviewer: Okay.

Freeman: The doctors were white. We had a very few. We had a Dr. Brown, a Dr. Hopper. We had a few black doctors that worked up on Lawrence Street at that time. Now whether they were on staff up there and all that, I don't remember that. But I don't remember any black doctors.

Interviewer: Do you know Dr. Weddington?

Freeman: Absolutely.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about him?

Freeman: I didn't know him personally. I went to school with Dr. Weddington's brother's children. I can't remember her name. It escaped me. But anyway, they lived up on Lawrence Street. Patricia. Her name was Patricia Weddington. And I think they have a son named Homer Weddington. But like I said, I think Dr. Weddington was their uncle. So knowing Dr. Weddington personally, I did not.

Interviewer: Okay. And he didn't operate out of the hospital at all?

Freeman: I'm not sure. I don't think so, but I'm not sure.

Interviewer: Okay.

Freeman: That would be ... Now, Eartha Head could tell you that. Or had you asked Mrs. Clara Jenkins, she could tell you that.

Interviewer: Okay.

Freeman: But I'm not sure.

Interviewer: So, can you talk a little bit about extracurricular activities at school?

Freeman: Oh lord, I was in everything. I was a cheerleader and I was a majorette and I was in the glee club, I sang in the choir. I think I was in the drama club. You know how kids used to just get in everything.

Interviewer: And most of this was across the street at the high school?

Freeman: That was at the high school, yeah. Absolutely.

Interviewer: Do you remember a hobby fair?

Freeman: I do remember us having a hobby fair. I remember us having a May Day. Do you remember May Day?

Interviewer: I've heard. Every single person has mentioned it. [Freeman laughs]

Freeman: Huh?

Interviewer: Every single person I've talked to has mentioned May Day.

Freeman: Oh May Day. May Day, we actually ... May Day was like ... They would put a pole, a real tall pole. And on the pole they would have all these strings and the strings came down and we would plait the pole. We would plait the May pole. And they taught you how to go in and out and go in and out and go in out until you got down til it was totally plaited. Yeah.

Interviewer: That's an old sort of festival. The May Day festival. What did it mean to the kids on Lemon Street because everybody has mentioned it?

Freeman: For us it was fun. It was activity. I guess you might even want to say it was creativity because we didn't know, but we just knew when May Day come, we were going get to go out there and plait the May pole and play and have fun.

Interviewer: It was just a celebration.

Freeman: It was just a celebration. The history behind it, I don't know that I ever really understood it.

Interviewer: But for the Lemon Street High School it was a big deal.

Freeman: It was a big deal.

Interviewer: The hobby fair, there's tons of photos, lot of documentation, but people don't mention it as much.

Freeman: Really?

Interviewer: What are your memories of that if at all?

Freeman: I don't remember too much about the hobby fair. I really don't.

Interviewer: You've mentioned being a majorette and I assume attending all the football games.

Freeman: Oh yeah. Basketball.

Interviewer: There are several championships when you were in high school.

Freeman: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: Tell me about those and what it did to the school-

Freeman: Football season ... When it was time to go back to school you started getting ... Your mom started buying you little stuff. You'd get ready to go. Because back then we went back to school in September. And Labor Day ... We were always out of school for Labor Day. And it seems like the football season actually opened that Friday after Labor Day or something like that. And it was just ... Football season to me was one of the highlights of the school. I can remember going to championships. I can remember Jackie Menefee, Roosevelt Phillip, David Bates, Selmon Freemon. Because Oscar was older than I am, my husband, so that was back then. But those were one of the ... Larry Rosser. Oh my God. The list just goes on and on and on. I remember we won the championship one year and I think we went down to Moultrie, Georgia. And I can remember we beat them. And I still every now and then ... It's funny because you go to different places, run into people and they say they from Moultrie and we be like, oh yeah, we remember when we beat you. So we still had the little rivalry thing. A few weeks ago I run into some people that was from down there and I remember we won the game and coach Edger and Mr. Wilkins ... Because they would take us down on the bus. And I remember when the game was over the kids were so upset they started rocking. They started throwing rocks and we had to run. We literally had to run to get on the bus.

Interviewer: This is an opposing team?

Freeman: That was the championship. Yeah. That was the championship game. And people like James Bennett, I bet you he got so many articles on Lemon Street. You'd be surprised. Emanuel Grady. Oh my God. It was so many of ... It was the highlight of the school year. The football team was awesome. Basketball, I just went to the basketball games because it was just activity, it was something to do. But I never really was good at sports like that.

Interviewer: But you were a majorette?

Freeman: I was a majorette.

Interviewer: So was that every halftime?

Freeman: We performed every halftime.

Interviewer: Okay.

Freeman: And then we also did a homecoming where you select the homecoming queen and we always did a parade and we would march around the square from Lemon Street to the square, maybe down Church Street, back. Maybe all the way out to Roswell Street. I done forgot what we broke up at now. I'm old, I can't remember all that.

Interviewer: Well was that an exclusively Lemon Street parade?

Freeman: That was exclusive Lemon Street. You know what was strange to me? I don't remember what grade I was in, but I had to have been in high school. And I remember ... I'd say, all the white kids, especially the football team kids, they would come over and segregation was alive and well at that time. They were not allowed to come into our games and we weren't allowed to go to theirs. But they would come and they would [inaudible 00:24:14] peripheral of the football field and watch us play. And with the wall being so high up here at Marietta High, where you couldn't see over the wall to see them play, but they would come and watch us sometimes play.

Interviewer: What did you think about that?

Freeman: That's when I guess I knew something was awfully wrong. Because I don't think ... I think racism is taught. I don't think kids are ... You're not born knowing you're black or you're white. That's not a birth thing. Those differences are taught. And sometimes it's verbal and sometimes it's people's behavior. I can remember being in the grocery store once and this little white girl was in a buggy with her mother. And I was just teasing and playing with her. And the little girl kept saying something. And I wasn't sure what she was saying. I thought we was really playing back with me. And her mother was laughing under her breath trying to hold herself. And when she pushed the little girl away, it wasn't that she was so much trying to push her away from me because I was black, she pushed her away from me because the little girl was constantly saying mommy, that's a nigger. And when her mother realized it, I finally caught it. She just quickly pushed her on but I thought, man, that's what they're teaching their kids at home.

Interviewer: When was that?

Freeman: I was grown then. I was grown and married then.

Interviewer: Okay.

Freeman: My children were babies then. But you notice differences and you try to deal with it the best you can. But you try to make the wisest decision that you can make to not let negativity rest on you. Because if you do, it'll eat you up. You have to ... I remember when Dr. King was killed. Oh my God. That was a horrific time. I can remember Baptist Town. It was just not a good place to be. People were so angry but they weren't just angry in Marietta, it was all over everywhere. All over the country. And I remember they set cars on fire and they were just angry. Just so bitter and so angry at what happened and the way it happened. And just accepting the fact that it shouldn't have happened like that.

Interviewer: Were there voices of calm in the community?

Freeman: You know what, I would like to think that it was so much fear, you probably didn't know what to expect next so if you knew that a riot was going on in a certain area, you just stayed out of it. You just kind of stayed at the place of peace. Again, I had just been married two years when that happened. Was it two years? '68 was when he died, right?

Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Freeman: Yeah. I had just been married not quite two years. Or maybe two years. My husband was very much involved into civil rights at that time and he was in my opinion, a very calm kind of guy that tried to process and think about the better outcome than just ... But it was just shocking. I can remember he wanted my son, our oldest son at that time, to be very involved and a part of the celebration, the process. He wanted him to understand and to know what was going on. I can remember when Travis was little and my mom carried him into one of the ... Dunaway Drug Store. One of the drug stores. And she said this man came by them. It was a white man and he patted Travis on the head and said, "How are you doing little boy?" And my son spoke up and said, "My daddy said nobody calls me a boy." And it was just shocking to my mother that Travis was that bold, but he was listening to what his father had taught him. But at that time the ice had been broken and it was so much going on to try to level things back out and bring about some peace. So you know, you suffer these things and racism was alive and well. And you listen to black people, you listen to white people talk. And you realize that while maybe I had envy and vicious in my heart, you didn't. Or maybe you didn't feel the way your parents taught you. It's just an environment and it was a time in life. It was a process that we just had to work to to get to where we are. Even though things still happen now that shouldn't happen but, life is ... It's challenging. But you got to apply wisdom and think about what you do and think about what you say. Because it'll follow you.

Interviewer: I want to sort of come to the time when you met your husband. I assume you were still in high school or just finishing up?

Freeman: I was finishing up.

Interviewer: Okay.

Freeman: I actually met him in 1965. His father, Oscar Freeman, was a cab driver. He owned his own cap company and he had come home from the service from France. Those are the pictures that you saw there. To his sister Joyce's graduation. And she graduated on a Thursday and their father fell dead Monday morning. And they buried him sometime later that week. I don't remember what day. And I went to the funeral service and I actually met him that day and not knowing that it would grow into a relationship. The next year, I graduated and should have been going off to college but I got married. 1966.

Interviewer: So, you were planning to go to college or thinking you would go?

Freeman: I was thinking I was going. I actually thought I was going to go to University of Chicago because I had family live up there. And I met Oscar and oh well. That didn't happen.

Interviewer: Now tell me again, why you were at the funeral.

Freeman: I went to the funeral because I was best friends with Oscar's sister Joyce.

Interviewer: Okay, so you already knew her?

Freeman: I knew her. Yeah. We were friends in school.

Interviewer: Okay.

Freeman: We were majorettes and cheerleaders together.

Interviewer: Did you know he existed?

Freeman: I think I knew of him. I probably even tried to call him. Seemed like friend of mine from Rome ... Because we played Rome, Georgia for basketball and my cousins that lived up there would come down and bring girls with them. And I think one of them had me to call Oscar one day for her. I didn't know what I was doing. I didn't know him from a can of paint so I called. I did. I called him. I never knew I would get to know him or anything about him. I don't even think I realized that was Joyce's brother.

Interviewer: Well that's my question. If you or Joyce, maybe you had seen him at their house.

Freeman: I had never seen him. I didn't know. I mean I knew she had a brother, but when I met her, he was stationed in Paris. He had been stationed there for three years. So when I met her, he was just a picture on the dresser. I never had any idea that I would be able to get to even know him.

Interviewer: And where did he grow up in Marietta?

Freeman: Over on Fort Hill Homes.

Interviewer: So, in the-

Freeman: You know we're Louisville, we're Baptist Town and we're Fort Hills, you know that don't you?

Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Freeman: Yeah. Okay, well he was born in ... Well I don't know that he was born. I actually think he was born up here right off the square, what they call Happy Flat at that time. But anyway, he was raised over on Fort Hill Home area.

Interviewer: So, he was in the area, he was not in the projects?

Freeman: They lived in the projects. Yes they did.

Interviewer: Okay, in those homes?

Freeman: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. And that is where he grew up from birth to high school age?

Freeman: Yeah. Until he graduated from high school.

Interviewer: Okay. And did he come all the way up through the Lemon Street schools?

Freeman: Yes.

Interviewer: Because they're right there next door.

Freeman: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay.

Freeman: Oh, they right there in the projects. All they did was walk down the street and cross the street.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's a short-

Freeman: They were at school, yeah.

Interviewer: And his father was Oscar senior and what was his mother's name.

Freeman: Lilian. Lilian Freeman.

Interviewer: Okay.

Freeman: Lilian Jennings Freeman.

Interviewer: And he had a sister. Did he have any other siblings?

Freeman: Yeah, he had Miriama, Annie Ruth, who was Mickie. He had Barbara Jo, would we called Barbara. And he had Joyce. Those were his four siblings.

Interviewer: And what can you tell me about his family?

Freeman: His family was very loving, very caring. His mother was the one that really led me to the lord. She's the one that taught me about the word of God. Very sweet. Mother was a seamstress. She could sew anything. She could take a newspaper and make a pattern. She was just that good. Very, very, very creative. Joyce was very athletic. Miriama, the oldest one, was a musician. Mickie was a singer and Barbara was a school teacher.

Interviewer: And how did your husband make the decision to join the military?

Freeman: I don't know. I think I heard the story that he was talking to a cousin of his and asking what are you going to do and he said, "I'm getting ready to go in the Air Force." And he said, "Oh, why are you going do that?" And he said, "Well I'm going downtown, I'm going to learn. I'm going to join." And he said, "I am too." So they left here together going to military in 19 ... early '60s, something like that.

Interviewer: Had he done any other work or attended any college after high school?

Freeman: He did. He went to Leo College while he was in the military. He took quite a few courses because he was ... The F22 fighter plane was his plane out there at Lockheed. So he was a property administrator for the government. Yeah, he was constantly in and out of classes all the time.

Interviewer: How long would he be in the military overall?

Freeman: The total time was 25. 25 plus a few months over. He did either four years or six years active and the rest of it was a reservist. He went back and stayed in until he got his ... His plaque and stuff is out there in the hallway.

Interviewer: So, when you married, was he back permanently from France?

Freeman: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay.

Freeman: He got out in 19 ... He actually came out in, I think it was March of 1966.

Interviewer: And then when did you marry?

Freeman: We got married September 18th, 1966.

Interviewer: And where did you Marry?

Freeman: Marietta, Georgia.

Interviewer: Was it a church or a home?

Freeman: No, we met at one of the elder's homes. Yep, we did. All I know, it was on Henry Drive.

Interviewer: And then where did you live after you married?

Freeman: We lived on Lawrence street for about two months. And after that we bought a house in Smyrna. No we didn't. We moved to Louisville. Back where I was born and raised. And we lived there about two years, not quite three years. Then we bought our first home in 1970 in Smyrna. We stayed down there eight years. We came back to Marietta and lived up by Sprayberry High School for 27, 28 years, something like that.

Interviewer: So that was your long-term home?

Freeman: That was our long-term home. When we left there, and we moved to west Marietta. And we lived over there ... Well I did for almost 13 years. He only lived two and a half years after we moved over there. We moved there in 2005 and he passed away in 2007. He got sick in 2008 and he died March 2009.

Interviewer: Okay. When he would have been about 70?

Freeman: He would have been 70, his birthday.

Interviewer: Okay. And he was on reserves for most of that time in the military. Did he do other work?

Freeman: Oh my God. Most of it was ... He used to say two things that happened to me. The greatest things that happened to me. He said, "Giving my life to the lord and joining the military." He loved his military training. He loved his military life. He was a master sergeant and he would go do his UTA in some foreign country every yeah and he loved it. He loved foreign travel. Oh boy, I could just ... I have so many stories and we have so many pictures. Oh my God.

Interviewer: Did you travel with him?

Freeman: No, no, no. Because it was military training and usually they were gone like seven to 14 days, depending on where they had to go. There were a few times

that he thought he was going to be deployed back to active duty because of the Vietnam war and all that stuff was going on but thank God that never happened. And he finally retired out of ... He finally gave that up in ... I don't know what year it was but I think when he turned 60 years old. I think he had to come out when he was 60. Something like that. But anyway, that was the highlight of his life. He loved foreign travel. Loved foreign country history.

Interviewer: And you were raising how many children?

Freeman: Three.

Interviewer: Okay. And also working?

Freeman: Absolutely. I worked for the city of Marietta for 33 years almost. Like in four months.

Interviewer: Okay so you had worked as a nursing assistant at Kennestone.

Freeman: Oh, but I only did that in high school. That was just to help my mother pay for my graduation.

Interviewer: So then when did you start working for the city?

Freeman: I started working for the city of Marietta in 1974. And I stayed there until 2000 ... When did I leave? 2006 I think. Something like that.

Interviewer: What did you do for the city?

Freeman: I was the tax manager, tax collector.

Interviewer: All during that time?

Freeman: For the first 10 years I was on the BLW side. I worked in customer service. And then the city manager had me transfer to the city side. That's when I became the supervising manager of the tax department. And that's what I've done for 23 years I think. Sent out property taxes all over the city of Marietta collecting funds.

Interviewer: Can you tell me how your husband became involved in the NAACP?

Freeman: He told me in 1980, '81, he felt impressed to the Lord. He said to come back and help his people. And he wanted to help build the membership in the NAACP. So he got involved in the community things and he said that the membership was very low. And I think he started out with about 42 people I think it was. And he took it from 42 people up to around 400 and something people just in two years and most of it was footwork. He was a foot soldier. Oscar was a very jovial guy, very spirited, energetic person that everybody liked him. Well, everybody don't

like everybody, but you know what I mean. He got along with people and so he was able to just really rapidly help to bring some life back to the NAACP. He enjoyed his work very much. He started the Freedom Fund Banquet that they still have now. Back then he opened the first NAACP office, which was ... Winston Strickland owned the building down on Lemon street. And he gave him a small area there for an office there. And he stayed there until we found the location where they are to this day, over on Roswell Street.

Interviewer: What is the Freedom Fund Banquet?

Freeman: The Freedom Fund Banquet is an annual fund raiser that they do for the operations. To take care of the rent. Things got to be paid. But it's an annual fund raiser to support the finances of the organization.

Interviewer: In addition to increasing membership in Marietta, did your husband have other objectives?

Freeman: He did. They had a advocacy program where they would go out and try to help people get jobs. They also had a veterans affairs group that they had. They also had ... I'm trying to think. Who was over minority affairs? That might have been under Kennesaw college, though. The minority affairs group. I remember there was a group, I forgot what they called them, that were going to the schools, children were having problems. Children that felt that they were being ... Racism was alive. They were being treated unfairly. It was very busy. I remember they signed the first fair share agreement with the city of Marietta back in those days. Jack Crane was the city manager at that time. And what that simply says was ... Benjamin Hooks who was the national president at that time, they signed along with him. And basically what it was saying was that, you agree that you would hire qualified minorities into your corporation or into your business. Just give them a fair share. That's all they wanted, was a fair share. Because things were not as fair then as they are now. So they were fighting for freedom. They were fighting for equality.

Interviewer: So how long was he ... And this work with the NAACP was on top of his career in the military?

Freeman: Absolutely. And his job.

Interviewer: Okay. And his job being?

Freeman: His job was at Lockheed.

Interviewer: And what did he do at Lockheed?

Freeman: DOD. He was a property administrator for the government.

Interviewer: Right. Okay. So he had a lot going on. Were both of you sort of comfortable being busy?

Freeman: He was very comfortable because he was passionate. He felt like it was just really a call on him to do it. And not only that, I think Oscar saw the need. There were so many things that just needed to be handled. He worked along with Hugh Grogan, Deann Bonner, who is still involved now. She was involved in ... It was just such a need. You had Winston Strickland, James Dodd, James Goldberg. It was just so many people that was involved in trying to just level the playing field and to make things right.

Interviewer: When you think about the Marietta of your childhood and the Marietta today, taking into account the schools, the integration of the schools, your husband's work in the NAACP, how do you think the community has changed?

Freeman: You know, James I would like to say that it has changed for the better even though we still have some issues merging things and leveling them out and making them fair. What does change look like? We have better schools. Our kids get the same education that any other kid get now. But we're running into some kind of way. We're running into crashes. I'm not sure if it's because children are not being disciplined at home. Some of them are coming from broke up homes or if their home is not broken they're not getting their training at home. It's white kids ... I'm not in the school system, I can only talk about what you hear. But are black kids really being treated equally to how white kids are being treated? You really just don't know where the problem is and what's really going on then it can't really come together. But if you look at where we were back then and look at where we are now, we've come a long ways. Is there still room for growth? Absolutely. There's still some things that can be tweaked and changed. And how do we get there and what's going to make it better? Those are questions that you probably got to sit down with parents and school teachers and people that are directly involved. NAACP. People that are directly involved that can really put a better answer to that. But when you listen to the news and you hear in the community and all these things, all you're doing is really hearing information. You're not really in that. But I can just say that I think from where we were to where we are, things look better. Room for growth? I would probably say yes. I wouldn't close that door and say it was marvelous. No, I wouldn't say that.

Interviewer: Well, to sort of round out our conversation, I'd love to touch on the process of integration. Since this hasn't really been a linear conversation anyway from chronological, from beginning to now, I'd love to touch on integration. You graduated in '66, so this is the next to the last class at Lemon Street High.

Freeman: That was the last class, mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: Were you conscious of the efforts on the part of religious leaders, like at Zion and then, the first students making a choice to go?

Freeman: I can remember when we found out that our class was the largest class I think that ever come from Lemon Street in '66. And I can remember when we were coming out, there were one class left behind us. And I was thinking, I'm really glad that we're getting out. That I'm getting out of here. Because I just didn't know what to expect. I'd never been taught by a white teacher. I hear kids from the north ... In fact, I was talking to a lady the other day that's my age from the north and she said, "I never had a black teacher." So I thought, that's really interesting. So I can remember maybe somewhat apprehensive or fearing what would happen if I had to go to the white school. Was my level of learning going to be good enough? Was I going to pass? I just remember that I was glad that I was coming out and I wasn't going to be the one to have to integrate. Because it wasn't a good feeling. I knew the two people that integrated Marietta High School, the two females. Daphne Delk and the other girl was Treville Grady. And I can remember hearing about the opposition. And I can remember hearing that I don't know what happened with Treville. I don't know that she really went or did she stay or did she ... I don't remember what the story was because they were behind me. And of course when I got out, I moved on into adulthood and got married so I don't know what was happening back there. I can just remember being glad that I wasn't going to have to be the one to go through that.

Interviewer: And what do you think ... I assume you don't know them personally. Daphne and-

Freeman: Daphne Delk? Absolutely.

Interviewer: Okay. Have you had any conversation with her? Have you talked to her? What do you think it was about her that motivated her in that direction?

Freeman: You know what, I can't say that. But just talking with ... Daphne was a very smart girl. And I think it was just determination. And you got to think about it. When you're this age and you're trying to get through school and you have parents and you have rules and regulations and this is what they're saying that you got to do, you almost have no choice. You got to persevere and do it. And Daphne did well. I spoke with Daphne a couple of years ago as a matter of fact. I was able to get in touch with her and she came to the grand opening of the new park. The new water park for Elizabeth Porter. She was actually here in Marietta.

Interviewer: And she's in Decatur?

Freeman: She's in Decatur now. Yes.

Interviewer: So, you were ... You would say, a general sense of relief to not have to be involved with that?

Freeman: I was glad that I was not going to be the one that was going to have to integrate the school. I just didn't even know how to feel. I was just like, I'm glad it's not me. But then my last year of school, I'm going to be honest with you, I was so caught up with graduation coming up and the excitement of all of that. I don't remember having any really harsh feelings or couldn't sleep about it. It was just torn because one way or the other. I just remember thinking, I'm glad I'm not going to be the one. I'm glad we're getting out in time.

Interviewer: Right. So one of the sentiments that I hear is, there's a loss. There's a loss of Lemon Street. The building is torn down.

Freeman: I think ... I know that over the years we've talked about ... I can remember when the building came down. I can remember the emotions when they tore down Lemon Street and the old high school is dumped over there off of Fairground Street. Turner Chapel is on the right hand side. Excuse me, left hand side. And all that land over there where it kind of goes down, that's where the high school was dumped. I believe a man named Mr. Curtis Wiggly, that was his property at that time. And I can remember people feeling ... Some resented it, some hated it, some didn't want it torn down. But let's face it, blacks had no voice in anything going on at that time. We didn't have enough guns. And when I say guns, powerful people to help step in there and say, why are you all doing this? So I wasn't involved in that arena. I wasn't out there in the community like that. And the building has been gone so long now. That's one thing that makes my heart so happy about the fact that even though Fort Hills has been demolished, the elementary school has been saved. And I'm very proud of Dr. Rivera's suggestions. How to make it work for everybody. I'm a little concerned. I pray that it's not going to get lost when the new administration building goes up and the replica of the old high school is there. I hope that it'll be a place of pride and I hope that people won't be prevented from coming by a place of interest because, I think as people come back, they'll come and we certainly ... I can just about remember every classroom in Lemon Street High School. You know, when you're there, you're going to school and then you're all involved. I remember the gymnasium and the stage where we went every Thursday morning for general assembly. Well I call it the general assembly but every Thursday morning we all went in there and we pledged allegiance to the flag and whatever, so a lot of memories. It's a lot of memories. It's a lot of history. And I've encouraged every black person that I know, you all can't tell our history if we don't give it to you. You won't know it. So I'm encouraging everybody that I know to get involved, give you the interviews. You tell your story. Mine may be a little different from somebody else's but we can only speak from who we are and where we are.

Interviewer: Would you like to add anything else before-

Freeman: Well I'd like to say for me, I've been a lot of places thanks to my husband. We've been a lot of places and I've seen a lot of beautiful areas in my life in other states. Did a little bit of overseas traveling. But for me, I love Marietta. I've always wanted to come back home. I never really wanted to move away from

here permanently and my life and my time and my work at the city of Marietta, which is something that I adore. I always got along with people. I got along with staff. All of my city managers. It's been a good life for me and I'm grateful. I'm thankful for where I feel that the lord has allowed me to land. So I have no regrets. If I can help anybody as I travel along, then I guess I could end by saying, my living won't be in vain.

Interviewer: Thank you so much.

Freeman: Absolutely.