Eileen Tucker Cosby

Layton, UT

An Interview by

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GOOD MORNING, TODAY IS THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15TH, 2024. I'M WITH EILEEN TUCKER COSBY, AND WE ARE AT THE LAYTON HERITAGE MUSEUM IN LAYTON, UT. I AM INTERVIEWING EILEEN FOR THE VERDLAND PARK ORAL HISTORY PROJECT, AND ALSO THE LAYTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECT.

TF: Thank you for being with me today. We'll just do what we did when I interviewed your parents: if you could start off by telling me when and where you were born, and what it was like for you growing up.

EC: I was born August 27, 1958. It was a glorious day for my parents, because they'd had a hard time conceiving and holding a pregnancy. So when this one went through, it was really exciting for them. I was born at St. Benedict's Hospital in Ogden, although I would have been born in Layton, had there been hospital here at the time.

But I was born into a very loving family. I had an aunt and uncle who lived very close to us. My aunt was my mother's sister, and that's how my mother ended up in Utah. My aunt kept having babies, and she needed someone to help her with her kids. So, she sent for my mother, and my mother came to help. So I belonged to a family with not only a wonderful mom and dad, but also an incredible aunt, uncle, and their four boys, and that was wonderful. I saw them every single day of my life until I moved away to college.

It was like a commune. My parents always lived right next to my uncle and aunt, so I spent a lot of time with my cousins. We were in and out of each other's houses a lot. Whatever I didn't get from my mom and dad, I just asked my uncle and aunt for, and whatever my cousins didn't get from their mom and dad, they would come and ask my parents for. (laughs) So that worked out great.

I have such great memories of Verdeland Park. I was there from the time I was born, and we started out in O-Court. We lived there until I was five or six years old, then we moved to N-Court. But it was just a wonderful time.

TF: Which unit in O-Court?

EC: It was unit seven, and O-Court was smack dab in the middle of where Layton High is today.

TF: And where was N-Court?

EC: It was across the street, where the park is today. And you know where the LDS seminary is? That was where my aunt and uncle's house was.

TF: Where were you in relation to them, when you lived in N-Court?

EC: We were kind of right up the street. We lived in N-46, and my aunt and uncle lived in N-87 or 89—one of those. But N-46 was across from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, so it was just a little bit north of my aunt and uncle's unit.

TF: Do you remember who any of your neighbors were?

EC: In O-Court, there was Ruby and Ralph Price, and they had five children. And there was the Martinez family. I want to say they lived kind of next door. I was younger when we lived there, so I don't remember who many of our neighbors were. But in N-Court, we had the Dixon family, the Palomine family, the Lees, the Fosters, the Riveras, and the Romeros.

TF: I think I've heard some of those last names, but not all of them.

EC: I don't know if he's alive, but Ralph Romero was one of the kids I remember. And there was a family with the last name of Morman. Go figure that one. (laughs) Sherry and Rodney. But I knew people in other courts as well, like H-Court, and A-Court.

TF: Are there any other particular names that stand out? You knew so many people.

EC: There was the Spinks family—they lived in H-Court—and the Wardell's. I think their son's name was Rodney. They were also in H-Court. And the Hughes family—Kevin and Travis. I want to say they also lived in H-Court. You know where those little ducks are?

TF: Yeah.

EC: That was where H-Court was.

TF: Okay. What were some of the things that you enjoyed doing when you were growing up in Verdeland Park?

EC: Well, the coolest thing about Verland Park was the way that they had it laid out. You know how if you enter Layton Commons Park now, there's that road that goes around the park?

TF: Yes.

EC: Well, there were homes around that road there, and in the middle, where the actual park is, was where there were, like, little parks for us. There was always kind of land in the middle of the courts—like a small grassy area—and that was like our own park. We would literally just walk outside of our house, and there was this park in the middle, and all the children would just meet in the middle and play. And it seems like our house was always the football goal line. (laughs) So all the boys … well, the Lee family had a football team all on their own, because they had, like, seven boys living there. And then of course, there were my four cousins, and Mace and his family. But they would all gather to play football, and our house was the goal line. That was so great.

But it was just fun all the time, because there were so many of us kids. We all walked to school together, and there was just never a time when you didn't have someone to play with. I don't remember anybody ever being alone—unless they wanted to be—because we all had so many friends. I can remember my mom and dad throwing a party for my fourth birthday, and it

seemed like everybody was there. We were all dressed up in our frilly outfits. (laughs) But it was just fun.

And then when Halloween came, we trick-or-treated in Verdeland Park, then we'd go over to the Whitesides neighborhood, because it was a better neighborhood, and we thought they'd give out better candy. So, a bunch of us would haul it over to Whitesides, which was just across the street from us, going east.

TF: It seems Verdeland Park was an area where kids felt safe to go from one court to the next to the next—well, go anywhere within the neighborhood, really—and play. Was that how it was?

EC: Yeah, we could go anywhere. And although maybe not everybody knew each other, we always felt comfortable there. I talked earlier about the incredible diversity in Verdeland Park—I never felt uncomfortable going anywhere. Nobody felt uncomfortable with each other. It's hard to visualize no prejudices during that time period; I mean, there may have been, but I was just totally unaware of of it, because I had every kind of friend, and we just had so much fun.

My parents associated with people within Verdeland Park as well. For more of their "social life" activities, they would go to Ogden, like to dances and different things like that. But they got along with their neighbors in Verdeland Park just fine. But I don't recall ever being treated like I was different until I moved out of Verdeland Park, because while we lived there—and I didn't recognize it then—we just lived in this bubble. We went to Verdeland Park Elementary, and it was a very diverse school, because the kids who went to the school represented our neighborhood. We had all kinds of different kids in our classes. So, it was quite a rude awakening when we left Verdeland Park.

TF: Yeah, because the background of Verdeland Park was so different from Utah in general.

EC: Yeah. And honestly, the things I learned about Utah after I moved out of Verdeland Park … I just didn't know that things were different outside of Verdeland Park—not just in Utah, but in Layton as well. So when we moved out of the bubble in Verdeland Park, I was like, "What in the world is going on?"

TF: Right. I want to go back to that, but I wanted to mention how I've interviewed at least three or four people who said something similar to what you said: that when they lived in Verdeland Park, whether someone was Black or white made no difference to them. There was no, "Oh, you're Black and I'm white.

EC: Yeah. I never heard any name calling, or anything like that. My cousins were really active in sports. They played in Little League with all the other boys, and the parents cheered for everybody at Little League games. I mean, you might get different accounts in your interviews, but I honestly don't remember anything negative like that, and I lived in Verdeland Park until I was eight years old.

TF: You mentioned kind of how the center of Verdeland Park was a grassy area where all the kids would play.

EC: Yeah. There little park-like areas in the middle of the houses that went around the courts.

TF: It seems like on maps I've looked at, Wasatch Drive went through the middle. So where would that be in relation to this grassy area?

EC: Well, Wasatch Drive was the road you took to get into the different courts. I don't think Wasatch was any different than it is now—it's just that every court had its entry from Wasatch. So let's say that you started out at Gentile and came up a little bit. Well, you'd take a right, there would be a street, then you'd make another right, and you'd go into A-Court. And you'd just follow that along, then you'd come out, then maybe you'd make another right, and you'd end up

in H-Court. So you'd just enter the courts from Wasatch Drive, but the "gathering places", or [grassy areas] were in between the houses in each court. I don't think all the courts had those grassy areas in the middle, but some of them did.

I remember O-Court had a little park in the middle, and I don't even know if it was ever intended to be a park, but that's just kind of how it ended up. But in some of the courts, you'd have a row of houses, a park, and then another row of houses.

TF: Okay, that makes sense. I wasn't sure if the park area was, like, a place of meeting in between all the courts or what; but it sounds like it was just within the courts itself.

EC: Yeah. But like I said, I don't know if every court had one. I don't recall that being the case with H-Court; hopefully you'll speak to someone who lived in that court. But I remember there being just houses along the street. I don't recall there being a grassy area in the middle. But I think it just depended on what court you lived in.

Have I mentioned to you about what the houses were like?

TF: No. I was going to ask you about that.

EC: Well, they were manufactured homes. They were from the WWII era, and I think they originally housed Hill Air Force Base officers. An when the war was over, I think they planned to dismantle them, because from a stability standpoint, they were only meant to last for a certain amount of time. So Layton City purchased the homes and rented them out, and the residents there, like us, were the renters. We didn't own the homes. They stood kind of high, and they had either two or three-bedrooms. Today, they would maybe be the equivalent of a town home, except that they weren't stacked—they were long. They were connected in the middle.

For example, there might have been a three-bedroom house connected to another three bedroom, and the front door to this house would be here, and the front door to the other house

would be there. And sometimes, like if the people who lived in the unit connected to yours had kids jumping around, you could feel it on your own floor. (laughs) And the units were small. They didn't seem small to me then, but when I look at them now, I'm like, "Whoa, they were pretty small." (laughs)

But when you walked in, you'd come to the kitchen and living room first, and there was usually a place where you'd put your kitchen table. Then there was the living room. We had a two-bedroom unit, because it was just me and my parents. My cousins had a three bedroom. And we also we had one of those … I guess it was a gas heater. I remember my daddy bending down to light the heater, and I'd always jump on his back. I just thought that was so much fun.

We had a washer in our unit, but we didn't have a dryer. S when we had to dry our clothes, we would either put them out on the clothesline—and that was cool, because I got to see all the moms outside in the summer, hanging their own clothes, and we could say "hi", and chit chat—or we would go to Bay cleaners. It's been there forever. Sometimes we would go there to dry our clothes.

But our unit also had a stove, and then the bedrooms were in the back. And there was a bathroom. There weren't any of these two-bathroom things like you have today; even the three-bedroom units just had one bath. But people would squeeze as many children into the bedrooms as they could. (laughs) With my cousins' family, two of the boys shared one room, and the other two shared the other room. And if there were more kids than that, which sometimes there were, there might be three or four in one bedroom. I had a friend who told me she had to sleep in the hallway. They had, like, ten kids or something. But people just did what they had to do.

Rent was something like $25 a month—maybe $15 to $25—and I think that after the war the units were only rented out to federal employees who worked either at Hill Air Force Base or

the Naval Supply Depot. When we lived there, it seemed like most people who lived there either worked on Base, or they were a military family who belonged to the Air Force. My parents, as well as my uncle and aunt all worked on Base at some point. When we first moved, just my uncle and dad were employees there, but later on, both my mom and my aunt worked on Base as well. So, it seemed like everyone there had that connection.

TF: Right. Going back a little bit, one of the things that sometimes comes up in my interviews with people who lived in Verdeland Park is the bathtubs. Some of the older ones were made out of concrete, and people would paint the concrete to make them more … useable, I guess the word would be. Some people described them as being like sandpaper. What your bathtub like that?

EC: Ours certainly wasn't like sandpaper, and I don't remember it being made out of cement. I want to say that it was just a regular bathtub, although it did seem big to me. But I was just a little girl.

TF: That makes sense, because it was just you. You didn't have a lot of siblings in the bathtub at one time, trying to elbow each other for space. (laughs) You didn't have to fight for space.

EC: Yeah, I didn't. I was the only child. But I don't remember anything significant about bathroom—only that we had one.

TF: Interesting. Most of the memories people have shared with me about the bathtubs have been negative, but they've mostly come from people who lived in Verdeland Park in the beginning. My friend who grew up there in the early 50s, for example, talked about how rough his concrete tub was. And then another family I talked to said their tub always felt like sandpaper. And another person told me their parents had to paint over the concrete to make it a little smoother.

EC: Interesting. Maybe we got a smoothed-over one. And it could have been just the time period that we lived there. I was born in 1958, so we lived there in latter part of the ‘50s and the early ‘60s. So maybe we got an upgraded tub. Maybe it was made out of porcelain, or something like that.

TF: I’m glad it had improved by the time you lived there. So your parents lived in Verdeland Park because your dad worked as a civilian on Base. Is that correct?

EC: Right. My father came to Utah looking for a job, and at first, he didn’t know what that job would be. His father also lived here, so he came here to meet up with his father and to get his life started. He actually started out working at the Hotel Utah in Salt Lake as a dishwasher. But then he heard that there were jobs at Hill Air Force Base, so he applied after being in the Army. I think he had a little heads-up there. It was a little while before he got a job there, but he did get one eventually.

My uncle came from Detroit; well, they were all originally from the South. My dad was from Texas, but my mom, my uncle, and my aunt were all from Mississippi. But my uncle heard that there were jobs in Detroit, so he went to there first and worked at Ford Manufacturing making cars. Tut he hated Detroit, and he had a young family. Well, his brother lived in Ogden, and he was working on Hill Air Force Base. He told my uncle he should come to Utah. He said, “I promise if you come, you’ll have a job the same day.” And that’s what happened. So he got a job on Base, then he sent for his family, who was in Mississippi at the time, and they all came here

Then, going forward a little bit, my dad came to Utah and lived in Salt Lake. Then he heard about jobs at Hill, and he applied for a job, but he didn’t get it right away. It took him a month to get a job there.

TF: That seems like a long time, because wasn't the Base filling jobs pretty quickly at the time?

EC: Yeah. So when he eventually got his job at Base, he lived in Ogden. And then my mother came to town, and he heard about her—and you'll probably talk about that later—but he met her at Sahara Village, which was another Armed Forces housing development. It was right across the highway from South Gate at Hill Air Force Base. But he met her there because she was living with my uncle and aunt. They had a growing family, and they were growing out of their unit in Sahara Village. Plus, they heard that Sahara Village was eventually going to be torn down. They knew at some point, they'd have to leave.

Well, they heard about Verland Park, and they wanted to stay in Layton. So, they applied to get at place ther, but there was nothing available at the time. So they had to go to city hall and get on the waiting list. But just when things were getting down to the wire, my dad said, "I'm going to go check to see if anything's available now." And sure enough, they told him, "We actually have two units that will be available next month, and we were going to call you." So my dad said, "Whatever I need to do to get in, I'll do it right now," and that's how they got into Verdeland Park.

TF: Before I forget, what were your grandparents' names? I think I forgot to ask that when I interviewed your parents.

EC: My mother's parents were Samuel and Hattie Mae Brown, and they were from Mississippi. And that's where my mom and my aunt were raised. And my mom came to Utah to help her sister when she was about eighteen. Originally, she was supposed to go home—she was only going to come here for a little while. But during the time she was here, she met my father and didn't want to go home.

TF: That's a good reason to want to stay.

EC: Yeah. And my father was actually raised by his uncle and aunt in Texas. I don't know if I've told you my uncle and aunt's names, but they were Richard and Julia Nelson. They were a beautiful couple. And ironically enough, my uncle was also named Richard Nelson. So I think about what it must have been like for my father to meet my uncle, who was also Richard Nelson. But let me tell you, he and my dad were like brothers. They had to be because they were married to my mom and her sister, and those sisters were going to be together no matter what. That's all there was to it. They just said, "All right, this is the way it's going to be." They were very, very close.

But anyway, my dad's uncle Richard and his wife raised him until they passed away when he was about seventeen. His own mom passed away when he was about six months old, and his dad was really young himself—he was only nineteen—and he went off to work on the railroad. So, that's how my father ended up being raised by his own uncle and aunt. But he always knew that his father was in Utah, so when he was 23, he came to Utah and met his father for the first time. His father's name was Andrew Tucker, and my dad's mom was Vivian.

TF: Do you know about the time your dad's father came to Utah to work on the railroad?

EC: I want to say it was around 1939 or 1940 that he started working on the … route, I guess, is what you would call it, between Kansas City and Ogden. And he also worked part-time at the Hotel Utah just to pick up some extra money. And so that's how my dad started working at the Hotel Utah as well. But my grandfather would get off the train in Salt Lake rather than Ogden, and he'd walk up to the Hotel Utah to go to work at his second job. And he had to use the freight elevator, because they wouldn't allow him to come through the front door. And my dad had to do

the same thing. They were never allowed to eat at the hotel, an they had to use a separate bathroom, and things like that.

Well, many years later as an adult, I was having lunch at the top at the Hotel Utah, and from up there, you could see the old Union Pacific Station, and you can see down West Temple. But I could just visualize my grandfather and my dad walking to work, and it brought tears to my eyes. It was surreal for me, because now I was up there having lunch, which was something my father and grandfather could never do. And at that moment, I just wanted to tell them, "Thank you for all the things you did, and all the things you went through for me."

TF: Right. And when your father started working as a civilian on base, did he go through similar things? Like only being able to eat in certain places, or things like that? I thought I read somewhere that in the beginning, only white officers were allowed to go to the Officer's Club on base, and Black officers had to go somewhere off Base.

EC: Do you know what year that was?

TF: I don't. I can't remember where I read about it.

EC: Well, my mother was employed at the Officer's Club, and I don't ever recall her saying anything like that; but she started working there in the '60s, so that was a later time period. I guess something like that could have happened in the '40s or '50s maybe. But I don't recall my father ever saying anything about being segregated in at his work; but he learned a lot about the LDS church from a gentleman he worked with who was very happy to give him information. And they had kind of a love-hate relationship; that's a whole other story. But I don't recall him ever saying he had to use a different bathroom, or anything like that.

TF: Do you know what year he started working on Base?

EC: I want to say he started working there in 1953 or ‘54—something like that. Before that, he served in the army during the Korean War, and his unit was segregated. He told me there were actually some integrated units during that time as well, but he just happened to be in a segregated one. So I’m guessing when this integration in military units took place, integration on military bases took place as well. So by the time he worked at Hill, it probably wasn’t much of an issue for him.

TF: Okay. At what point was your dad able to actually walk through the front door of the Hotel Utah, instead of using the freight elevator? I’m guessing it was some time after he actually worked there.

EC: I would guess probably somewhere in the 60s, because I know Lagoon was that way as well. All the venues were—that’s just how it was. But whenever it was, he was long gone by then. He left after he got the job on Base.

TF: Okay. Tell me some more about your favorite memories of growing up in Verdeland Park. You described it as a bubble—completely different from what you experienced when you moved out.

EC: Oh my gosh. I just felt like everything was so fun all the time. I don’t know if it was because I was blessed to be born into such a wonderful family or what, but it just seemed like everybody was happy. I told you I lived next door to a family who had a ton of kids. We were always playing together. And there was Thelma, who was part of the Lee family. She and I were the same age, and as people started moving out of Verdeland Park, we knew they weren’t going to move back in, because they were going to start building Layton High. But Thelma and I would go and play in all the empty houses. Of course, our parents would say, “Don’t play in the empty

houses," so that's exactly what we did. (laughs) But we just had every kind of friend you could imagine.

I remember that May Day at Verdeland Park was a big thing. All of us—the whole school—would just play games all day long, but the highlight was the orange creamsicles. Oh, we loved those! And I can just picture all the little girls in their little groups, just chatting. But we would go to all the Little League games. Those were a big deal. And the Layton Jaycees were also a big deal. They were the party group. (laughs)

But I remember grilling hot dogs and playing night games. And I can still picture my mother sitting in the two-foot Layton pool. At that time, the Layton pool was just the old, little part of it now. The big inside part didn't exist. But to me at the time, it seemed like it was so big. There were the separate locker rooms, and we'd go in and change. But I remember my mom sitting with me and Thelma in that pool. And when we got out, we'd get Clover Club barbecue chips, because they sold them at the front desk where we'd get our key.

I just don't know any other way to describe living in Verdeland Park except magical, and I just thought that was the way that it would always be. The rest of Utah was so different. Verdeland Park was just here in the middle of Northern Utah. There was nothing like it in Ogden, there was nothing like it in Salt Lake. My parents really wanted to stay here in Layton, but after we moved out of Verdeland Park, they had to fight to do that. But Verdeland Park was a great place for us to get started. I want to say that Ruby Price was the first African American teacher in Davis County—if not the state of Utah—and she just happened to be at Verdeland Park Elementary, which was an amazing thing.

She was my first and second grade teacher, so that's how I got started. And at the time, it was like, "Why wouldn't she be a teacher?" I didn't know at the time that that was a big deal.

But she was a friend of my parents, so there was a little bit more expected of me. She stayed on me. She made sure that I spoke correctly, that I didn't have smudgy papers that weren't neat, and that I wrote well. I remember one time when I was in first grade, I had a smudgy paper—God forbid—and we got a knock on our door about 6 o'clock. This is when we were in N-46, and I remember the evening news was on. So my dad answered the door, and in walked Mrs. Price. We always called her Mrs. Price, even the adults.

She came into our house and said, "Tommy, I want to show you Eileen's paper from today." And I was like, "Is she serious?" (laughs) It was smudgy because I had erased things and rewritten them. I didn't care. But she said, "This is just unacceptable." So, I never had a smudgy paper after that. (laughs) But with Mrs. Price, it didn't matter what kids looked like. She fought for everyone.

There was a time when the LDS Church pretty much ran the Boy Scout program in the area. It was only their program. And one day, my cousins—I think Wayne, in particular—wanted to be a Boy Scout. He said, "They meet at the White Chapel," which was just down here on the corner. So my aunt said, "Okay, let's go figure out [how to get you in]." So one day, she went down there and asked a woman about the program. The woman looked at her like she'd seen a ghost. She said, "Well, the program is full." My aunt said, "Can we put them on the waiting list?" And the woman didn't know how to answer her. She was kind of stumbling over her words. So then a guy just came out of an office, or whatever it was, and he said, "Ma'am, we don't accept Negros in our program."

Well, my aunt was shocked, because remember, we were living in this bubble where all the boys played sports together, and things like that. So she was devastated. She was like, "How do I tell my boys that they can't be in Boy Scouts because they're Black?" But she told her

neighbor, a white woman, what had happened, and she told her she also couldn't get her son in either, because they weren't Mormon.

So later, they ran into Ruby Price at the laundromat, and they told her what had happened. And Ruby was like, "This will not be tolerated." She wrote the Boy Scouts of America to complain about it, and she said, "I want a Boy Scout troop." And before you knew it, Little Miss Ruby Price made a Boy Scout troop for everybody. She was the den mother, and anyone could join her troop, whether they were Black, white, Native American, Hispanic, Asian, non-Mormon—it didn't matter. You could be in her troop.

So, it ended up being a beautiful thing. Verdeland Park had its own little Boy Scout troop, and eventually Girl Scout troop as well. I was a Brownie in that Girl Scout troop.

TF: That's as far as I got in Girl Scouts—just a Brownie. (laughs)

EC: Same.

TF: So, it kind of seems like any exclusion or racism that actually came into Verdeland Park came from members of the Church.

EC: I don't think there was racism, really. Well, I don't want to say there wasn't any, because I'm sure there was, but my family mostly experienced that after we left Verdeland Park. We knew everyone would have to move out eventually, although many of us were able to stay in Layton. But it wasn't easy; that's when it became difficult for us. My aunt and uncle and my parents had been saving for years, and when it came time for them to move out of Verdeland Park and get their own house, they were ready. They had the money down, and they had everything they needed, but the no one would show them any property. And when they were actually shown property, it was only at night. They couldn't even find a realtor in Layton to

show them houses, so they finally found someone in Clearfield. But even then, it was like pulling teeth to get him to show them any property.

But *finally,* hey were able to build a house right up the street from Central Davis Junior High, but that was no easy task. When they bought the property, the neighbors were not happy. You know how you go check on your house when it's being built? Well, the neighbors kept seeing this Black family—well, two Black families, because my uncle and aunt built a house right across the street—but they kept seeing us, and they were like, "Hey, we can't have these Black people living in our neighborhood. Our property value will go down, because of course, they won't take care of their yards."

TF: Right. And you told me earlier that your parent's yard was the best kept in the neighborhood.

EC: Yes. The first full year they lived there that they could actually have landscaping, they won an award from the state of Utah for having one of the best landscaped yards in the state. In. The. State! I just found a picture of that the other day, with them standing with all the other winners.

But all of this racism we faced happened *outside* of Verdeland Park. One of the challenges my parents faced was that they wanted to build on their own land—they didn't want to move into a house that was already built. They wanted to build their own. But it was just one thing after another. I don't know everyone else's stories, but I would imagine that many of us Black families who lived in Verdeland Park who remained in Layton after faced similar issues. I mean, we could have gone to Ogden and lived in a red-lined area, where they actually allowed Black people to live—

TF: Yeah, what was that neighborhood? It seems like there was, like, only a square block where they allowed Black people to own homes.

EC: I can't remember for sure, but that's where our church was. As a matter of fact, where New Zion Baptist Church was, my parents actually had a lot of friends there who lived in nice homes with manicured lawns. They all took care of their properties, and all of that. But my parents had been living in Layton, and that's where they wanted to stay. The realtor we finally got to help us said they'd be more than happy to show us homes in Salt Lake, where it was red-lined as well, and it wasn't that my parents had any issues with Ogden or Salt Lake, but they had their own dreams and aspirations.

They wanted to build their own home; it was something they'd always wanted to do. They didn't know many Black people in Utah who had done that, although they'd heard of one family in Salt Lake—Mr. and Mrs. Bordeaux—who had built outside of the red-lined area in Salt Lake. And it wasn't easy for them either, but they did it. And as it turned out, many years later, we found out that Mr. Bordeaux and my dad's father actually worked on the railroad together, and they both started on the same day. Isn't that crazy? But since that time, Mr. Bordeaux's son, Herb, and I, have been best friends.

But anyway, things were hard after we moved out of Verdeland Park. That's when the bubble popped. I will tell you that it was different for me than it was for my cousins, who were all boys. They were in sports, and no one was going to mess with them. They were also older when they moved. They were going to Central Davis Junior High, they were really involved in sports, and all the parents in the area knew them from that. So, they didn't have as many challenges as I did. I'm sure they dealt with some things, but for me, it was very difficult, because I didn't have the tight-knit community that had with sports. All of my girlfriends were

moving away, and the only one going to the same school as me was Thelma. And praise God for her.

All of my girlfriends in Verdeland Park either moved to other states because they were in the Air Force, or if they stayed in Layton, they went to different elementary schools. So, it was just Thelma and I, and we had a hard time with things like kids not wanting to play with us or not wanting to hold our hands when we were playing certain kinds of games. It was tough. So, I longed to be back in Verdeland Park, because things were better there. I mean, we *ran* things. (laughs) But after Verdeland Park, that did not happen.

TF: How old were you when you moved out?

EC: Eight.

TF: So you moved out when you were eight, and you said things were difficult until seventh or eighth grade. It that correct?

EC: Yes. I had all kinds of issues, and that's when I started finding out about Mormonism in some ways—not in a way that I would understood until I became a teenager, but just in ways that it was shown to me by people. For example, one time I was in third grade, we were playing some game where we had to hold hands. And this little boy said, "I don't want to hold her hand," and he used some derogatory racial term. So he went to the other side, and then the little girl who was left didn't want to hold my hand either, for the same reason. And then finally, someone held my hand because Mrs. Wakefield said, "That's enough." She was an angel from God, let me tell you. She really fought for me, and she was a Mormon.

So, I had all do deal with all of that. Some of the most wonderful people in the world I knew were Mormon, but also some of the worst people, and I learned later on that it was because of the belief that Black people were cursed because Cain killed Abel—that whole curse thing. So

you can imagine, if this is how these little kids were raised, and they were being told to hold my hand … I mean, who wants to hold the hand of a cursed person? I wouldn't, if that's how I was raised. But there certainly were others who weren't like that, and that was wonderful. But it was just confusing all the time.

But I had some great friends in third grade—these beautiful Hispanic girls, Alvi Martinez and Trina Nelson--who were just so sweet to me. I remember them inviting me to spend the night, and I thought, "Oh my gosh. This is so cool." And there was a white girl named Gail Fitches, who still lives in the area, who was also sweet to me. So third grade was a little bit better, but in fourth grade, I felt like I had to start all over, because that's just how it is when you start a new grade. You go to different classrooms, and there's another group of people you have to get to know.

As each year went on and I was trying to fit in, I didn't look like any of the girls around me, especially the white Mormon girls, of which there were an abundance, comparatively speaking, And they were all doing their primary activities in their church. They had all these church things going on. And starting in fifth and sixth grade, girls started liking boys a little bit, and they were always paired off. The white boys always liked the white girls and thought they were cute. And I didn't have a body like any of them.

I was in the third grade when I realized my lips were different than theirs, and things like that. And when I was in the fifth grade, we did this project where we had to draw a silhouette of ourselves. So we did that and brought them to school the next day, and my teacher Mr. Larsen, who was another amazing Mormon teacher and an amazing man—he and Mrs. Wakefield always ran neck and neck in my book, for being the best teacher—hung up all the silhouettes. He said, "Now everybody has to guess who's who." Well, the first thing that came out of one little boy's

mouth was, “That one’s Eileen. I can tell because she’s got those big old lips.” Then he started describing my features, and he said, “Too bad we didn’t do the whole body, because then we could see how big her butt is.” And this was fifth grade!”

I was humiliated. Nobody had lips that looked like mine, and nobody looked like me. I thought I was going to die, I was so humiliated. But Mr. Larsen sent that boy to the principal’s office immediately.

Mr. Larsen was very good about bringing out the best in his students. He didn’t let us slack off for a second. So one time, he gave us a project that was very difficult, and I just couldn’t understand it. And I got so frustrated that I stood up on a chair and slapped him. Well, he didn’t send me to the principal’s office; but he sat me down outside the classroom, told me to cool off, and said we’d talk about it later. And then we did. He told me, “You can’t act like that just because you don’t get it,” that kind of thing.

So Mr. Larsen sent that one boy to the principal’s office for saying those things to me, but he didn’t send me to the principal’s office for slapping him. That’s how invested he was in making my experience at school a better one. He just tried to understood what I was going through. He was amazing.

But going back to the whole boy thing, there were two little Black boys infifth grade—they were in different classes—and I wondered if one of them would be my boyfriend, but they weren’t. One of them was really good friends with my family. If you were Black and lived in Layton, you were family, so it wasn’t like you could have like a crush on someone who was like your brother. And then this other little Black boy came to town. His family was in the Air Force, and they also became close to our family. So I was like, “I’m never going to have a boyfriend.

It's just not going to happen." And I was also heavy; so not being like all the white girls around me, who I felt were beautiful, was really a struggle for me.

I didn't like my hair, because when I would go to the Layton pool and it got wet, it would get nappy. That's what we would call it in my community. So, I hated it. I didn't have high self-esteem at all. I just couldn't figure out where I fit in. And the white Mormon girlfriends I had weren't inviting me to all these wonderful Mormon things they were doing. So, I never went to Primary, and I was never invited to Mutual. But in junior high, my parents came to my rescue. They could see that I was getting depressed, so they just took control of what they could.

They said, "You don't like that you're chubby? Okay, let's get some of that weight off." So I went to Little Audrey's in Roy, and she helped me. And then then my dad said, "You're a little too withdrawn. We need to get you into sports," because that's what my cousins were doing. So, I got involved with the Layton City Little League for girls, and I started playing softball. And that's when I started meeting all kinds of girls outside of my elementary school. And of course, my cousins were not going to allow me to be anything but a good softball player. (laughs) Claude and Orlando spent a lot of time teaching me how to play hardball, not softball, and I got really good.

So by the time I got to junior high, there were a lot of different elementary school students going to school together, and I knew a lot of them already, which was great. And I started to blossom. I was no longer heavy, but unfortunately, I thought it would be better for me to have straight hair rather than curly hair. So I got a perm, which was a relaxer. That's another story, but basically, it took all my hair out. A black hairdresser did it, but what we didn't understand was it forces your curly hair to meet straight hair, and at some point, your regular

hair, which is curly, grows in, it meets the straight hair, which then pops off. So that's what happened, and it lasted for a little while.

But at one point, I had this straight hair, I was losing weight, and I had white Mormon friends. I'd made it! I call those the wonder years.

TF: Was that at Central Davis Junior High?

ET: Yes. But there were never a lot of African-American students. There were more than when we were in elementary school, where it was just Thelma and I, because we all converged. But in junior high, I had all those wonderful girlfriends, although I had hardly any Black friends. There was Thelma, and she was wonderful. She was like a sister to me, and I adored her, but there weren't really any others.

I just couldn't figure out why these girls I loved so much never invited me to these Mutual activities they always went for in their church. I think they went to Mutual on Wednesday nights, and they would always talk about it the next day. I could go to any social event at school with them, and we'd have fun together. They'd invite me to things like hayride parties, and we would sleep out in the hay. So I got invited to things like that, and I got invited to spend the night at lots of their homes, but when I'd ask them if they could spend the night at my house, it never happened.

I asked one girlfriend, Mary Ann Thompson, to spend the night. And she said, I don't think my mom and dad will let me. And I immediately thught it was because I was Black. But as it turned out, my house was the only house her mom and dad *would* let her spend the night at, because mine was the only one they trusted her to be at. Isn't that something? She was the first white girl to ever spend the night at my house. There were very few that ever did, and I found out later that it was because they didn't trust my dad. My dad is the most amazing man on the planet,

but they did not trust him because they thought he was cursed But Mary Ann's mom and dad never thought that, which was great.

But anyway, in junior high, like I said, I didn't have very many Black friends. My parents and I went to an all-black church, and that was wonderful, but I didn't fit in with those girls either. They just seemed to know who they were, and it was just different for me to be around them. I didn't know who I was, and I didn't know how to be when I was around them. They were just really "with it", and I wasn't. I was kind of like a little white farm girl, in a way.

TF: Did you feel like it was because you weren't living in Ogden, surrounded by other Black kids? You were kind of living between two different worlds.

EC: Yeah, I was in between two worlds in the sense that I went to an all-Black church, and I went to Black events, but I was just always with my parents. I never had Black friends, other than the ones I had in Layton, which were kind of like family. There were so few of us that of course we would be friends, and like a family. But there were four girls in Ogden who I adored—and still do, to this day—who were really, really sweet to me; but the other girls were not nice to me. I didn't know why, and I didn't know what to do to make that different.

The girls who were nice to me were Rashida and Debbie Jackson, and they both live in Layton now. They were sisters. Rashida's last name is Naylor now, and Debbie's last name is Bowen. But there was also Elaine and Martha Reynolds. They always made me feel welcome, but I couldn't see them all the time, because they lived in Ogden. But we became closer when we were teenagers. I really loved those girls.

But anyway, one day I was walking on a path through my neighborhood down to Thelma's house, and this little black girl with the cutest afro you've ever seen—it was so beautiful and soft. It was kind of a brownish color, and she had the most beautiful skin—but I

just looked at her and thought, "Who is this? This is so exciting!" Well, she was thinking the same thing, because she hadn't seen any other Black girls in the neighborhood. Her name was Jackie Patrick. But that was, like, 55 years ago, and we're still like sisters. But she introduced me to what was going on with other Black kids at Hill Air Force Base who belonged to military families. That was a whole new world for me, being able to meet those kids.

Jackie said to me, "There's a thing on Base called the Teen Club. Do you think you can go with me?" She told me more about it and I was so excited, but I said, "My mom and dad will never let me go." he said, "My mom and dad are strict too, but they let me go. So yours will let you go too." So her mom called my mom, and I was able to go with her to the Teen Club. Well, I walked in and saw all these Black kids, and I was just so excited. But I thought, "Are they going to like me?" That was always my concern: Would other Black kids like me?

TF: Right, because if you only grow up around white kids, it's just a different experience. It's kind of similar with some of the Black girls my daughter knew growing up who were adopted by white families. Some are in college now, but they're really only comfortable around white kids, and white people in general. But with my daughter, it was a little different, because of the relationship we have with her birth family. I always tried to be friends with other Black families while she was growing up so that she could be comfortable with Black *and* white people, but I think the thing that really made a difference was that she got to live for two or three years with her Black birth family, so she got to experience both worlds. I mean, she's always been comfortable around any race, which is great, but she's especially comfortable, now that she's been around her Black family and had Black friends there.

I don't know—it's just different. But I can kind of understand that angst you had of, "Will they accept me?"

EC: Yeah. It was like, "What about me will they like? They probably won't like most things about me." Those were the things going through my head. But Jackie really liked me, which was great. So I was like, "Okay, maybe I'm not so bad." But I think what was so great about this Teen Club on Base, where I was able to meet all of these other Black kids, was that they were military kids, and they had been around all different types of people. They had never been in situations where they were around all Black, or all white; they had to mix with everyone, and that's kind of where I was in some ways—not so much socially, but more so in church, and that sort of thing.

So, I started hanging out with them, and it was during my eighth or ninth grade year that I just loved being Eileen—that I loved being Black. I wasn't having any of the issues I'd had before. Like with my hair, I was like, "Whatever, forget about it." I had to cut it really short, and I looked ridiculous. As a matter of fact, I was looking at a picture of me at Central, and I'd scratched my face out, because my hair looked so awful. But really, I was okay with it, because I eventually figured things out. But anyway, I loved hanging out with my white *and* Black friends. Everything just started to mesh together.

But what also started happening was I began to understand a little bit more about the Mormon thing, where I fit into that, and what was really going on about the way they felt. I kept it in though; I didn't say anything to my white friends about it. Ninety percent of them were Mormon. But I asked my dad about it, because I knew about the whole situation where the neighborhood they wanted to move into sent around a petition against them moving in. And as I got older, I realized that some of those realtors who wouldn't show my parents different properties were actually the parents of some of my friends; so I didn't quite know how to handle that. It was like, "You come from a racist family."

So I asked my dad about it, and he said, "Well, are they nice to you?" I said, "Yes." And he said, "Then there's no need for you to bring it up. If they're kind to you, then just be kind back. Just like you have to do what we tell you to do, because we're your parents, they have to do what their parents tell them too until they know better. When they're older, they'll be able to do their own research, get their own facts, and that's when it will matter. But right now, if they're nice to you, then you can be nice too, and there's no need to bring it up. They'll figure it all out in their own time." And I was like, "Wow." I look back on that now, and I think that was very profound, especially because those people had made his life so difficult.

But anyway, I could not figure out why my friends never invited me to church. They invited me to everything *but* church. So when I was in the eighth or ninth grade, I finally had an opportunity to go to a Mormon church service, but it wasn't because my friends invited me; it was because the Glee Club, one of the singing groups I belonged to, sang there. In fact, one of the reasons I'm in Layton this weekend is because Lay-tones, one of the groups I sang in, are having a reunion.

But when I was in eighth or ninth grade, the Glee Club was invited to come and sing at a sacrament meeting, and I thought, "I'll finally get to go to the LDS church. We're doing all this practicing, and this is going to be so exciting." Not one of my friends thought it was exciting, because they went to this church all the time; but I just thought it was cool that I would finally get to go. But it wasn't like they were excited that I would get to go, or anything like that.

So we got there, and we saw where we were going to be seated, and no one was saying anything. But I couldn't believe how big the church was. Mind you, I was coming from the background of a small, all-Black church in Ogden. We had a little area where we worshiped, then we'd go downstairs, and there were a couple of little Sunday school classes, then a little

kitchen area where we cooked every once in a while. But for *our* standard, New Zion was a big church.

But I walked into this big, amazing LDS church, and I couldn't believe it. I was like, "Isn't anyone going to show me around?" I asked my friend, "Where are the restrooms?" And she pointed down the hall, So I went to the restroom, and I looked around as I walked to them, was in shock. I was like, "There's a basketball court! Are you kidding me?" There were all these classrooms, and I just could not believe what I was seeing. But when I finally I made my way back, my friends were like, "What took you so long? And I said something like, "I think I'm a little nervous," or whatever.

But what was interesting is that when my dad dropped me off, he didn't go inside. I mean, my parents went to everything I did, but they did not go to this. My dad dropped me off, and he told me, I'll just sit out here in the parking lot. If anything is wrong, I will be here." But he did not go inside. (recording stops)