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K-25 Oral History Interview

Date: 9/22/05

Interviewee: Eliza Robinson

Interviewer: Mitch Jerald

DOES NOT CONTAIN
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Name/Org: Eliza Robinson ENP/ Date: 4 Nov 15
CISCO

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[crew talk]

Jerald, M.: My name is Mitch Jerald. I am an interviewer, and today's date is September 22, 2000 --

[crew talk]

Jerald, M.: My name is Mitch Jerald. I am an interviewer, and today's date is September 22, 2005. I am interviewing Miss Eliza Robinson for recollection of activities associated with the K-25 facility, all facilities that's concerned with K-25 during the Manhattan Project and Cold War Era. Miss Eliza, will you give me your name and spell it for me please?

Robinson, E.: My name is Eliza May Robinson. E-L-I-Z-A M-A-E R-O-B-I-N-S-O-N.

Jerald, M.: Yes, mam. Thank you. Miss Liza -- I'm going to call you like your friends call you. I call you Liza.

Robinson, E.: Uh-huh (affirmative). That's right.

Jerald, M.: Okay. Where were you born?

Robinson, E.: I was born in Boonville, Mississippi.

Jerald, M.: Where? What town is that near?

[02:22]

Robinson, E.: It's near Carent (phonetic sp.), Mississippi.

Jerald, M.: Is that about mid-state? Somewhere in there?

Robinson, E.: Yes, it is. I'm 20 miles on the other side of Carent.

Jerald, M.: Okay. Is that the north side where you came from?

Robinson, E.: It's the north side.

Jerald, M.: North side. Okay. Okay.

Robinson, E.: That's correct.

Jerald, M.: Is that where you were living prior to coming here to Oak Ridge?

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Robinson, E.: That's correct. That's where I was born and raised, in Predis (phonetic sp.) County.

Jerald, M.: Okay. All right. How many was there in your family?

Robinson, E.: It was eight of us.

[02:55]

Jerald, M.: Eight of you?

Robinson, E.: Yes.

Jerald, M.: Mom and dad, what? Were they --?

Robinson, E.: And sisters and brothers.

Jerald, M.: Sisters and brothers, too.

Robinson, E.: Right.

Jerald, M.: What did they do?

Robinson, E.: My daddy was a farmer.

Jerald, M.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Robinson, E.: And I was too when I got bigger.

Jerald, M.: Uh-huh (affirmative). When you say bigger, how old is bigger.

Robinson, E.: Bigger was 11 and 12 years old. [laughter] And we was raised in three different groups. I never knew my mother.

Jerald, M.: Is that right?

Robinson, E.: Right.

Jerald, M.: Is that right?

[03:24]

Robinson, E.: So we was the bag that my sisters and brother were.

Jerald, M.: Is that right?

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Robinson, E.:

That's correct.

Jerald, M.:

Okay. Okay. So I got to ask you, what presented itself to get you interested in this part of Tennessee?

Robinson, E.:

Well, I worked down there, and I had finished high school. And I wanted to do something to help my mother and daddy, the one that raised me, which was my aunt and uncle that I call mom and dad. And I wanted to do something to repay them for what they did for us.

Jerald, M.:

So you were presented the opportunity to come here.

Robinson, E.:

That's correct.

Jerald, M.:

Who did you come up here with?

Robinson, E.:

I came by myself on the Greyhound bus.

Jerald, M.:

Came by yourself on the Greyhound bus. How old were you?

[04:17]

Robinson, E.:

I was 18 years old.

Jerald, M.:

Eighteen, eighteen. Now, now I got to ask you. What year was that?

Robinson, E.:

19 and 49.

Jerald, M.:

1949. And you went on that bus by yourself.

Robinson, E.:

I got on that bus by myself. I kept hearing about Oak Ridge, Tennessee and the jobs that they was going to create.

Jerald, M.:

Uh-huh (affirmative). Uh-huh (affirmative).

Robinson, E.:

And I talked to my dad, and he told me that would be fine.

Jerald, M.:

Uh-huh (affirmative).

Robinson, E.:

And that's what I did.

Jerald, M.:

That's what you did.

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Robinson, E.:

That's right.

Jerald, M.:

Now, now you jumped on that Greyhound bus.

Robinson, E.:

Right.

[04:55]

Jerald, M.:

And you landed where?

Robinson, E.:

I landed over in Scarborough where we live now.

Jerald, M.:

That bus brought you there?

Robinson, E.:

No. I got in a taxi at a gate or something.

Jerald, M.:

Uh-huh (affirmative). So the bus stopped where? Was it Kingston or something like that?

Robinson, E.:

It was something like that.

Jerald, M.:

Somewhere in Kingston or right near this area?

Robinson, E.:

Right. Uh-huh (affirmative).

Jerald, M.:

Yeah. Okay. Okay. So what did you expect? Because you had to have a picture in your mind.

Robinson, E.:

Right. I thought I was coming to a great big city, because I lived in the country. Cause it was night, and I saw all of those lights. And when it came daylight, I, you know, it was a big difference.

[05:38]

Jerald, M.:

It was a big difference.

Robinson, E.:

That's right.

Jerald, M.:

And I assume you were taken to the employment area or --

Robinson, E.:

Right. That's right.

Jerald, M.:

Tell me what transpired.

Robinson, E.:

Okay. When I was down in Mississippi --

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Jerald, M.:

Uh-huh (affirmative).

Robinson, E.:

I had worked for Foray (phonetic sp.) Moore that owned a store, a grocery store. And they had told me, "Liza, why don't you try to do better so you can help." He called my mother Mary and Charlie. My dad was named Charlie.

Jerald, M.:

Uh-huh (affirmative).

Robinson, E.:

And so we talked about it, and that's how Oak Ridge, Tennessee come up.

Jerald, M.:

Uh-huh (affirmative). Uh-huh (affirmative).

[06:16]

Robinson, E.:

Okay. And they all give me some money to come up here. Only I didn't have some when I got here. And I had a first cousin here, and they met me. They told me to tell the bus driver where I wanted to get off at.

Jerald, M.:

Oh, okay.

Robinson, E.:

And they met me and picked me up. And that's how I was here.

Jerald, M.:

Okay. Okay. Go ahead. I'm sorry.

Robinson, E.:

I was here two weeks, and I bought my reservation and you know where I had worked in Mississippi, and I got the first job working for a pharmacy.

Jerald, M.:

Okay.

Robinson, E.:

At his house. Okay.

Jerald, M.:

Yeah. Go ahead. You got your first job working over at a pharmacy here in Oak Ridge?

Robinson, E.:

Yeah. At the house. And I moved in with them.

[07:01]

Jerald, M.:

Yeah. Yeah. Okay.

Robinson, E.:

And they had a little boy named Randy. And I kept Randy.

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Jerald, M.:

Yeah. Uh-huh (affirmative). All right. Now, what was your education background?

Robinson, E.:

Well, I had finished high school, and I went to school taking up key punchin' and then all that stuff. And that's how I got where I was.

Jerald, M.:

Yeah. Okay. Okay. All right. Now I know when you left your home, man that was a tough thing to do.

Robinson, E.:

That's right, because I hated to leave them cause my daddy was sick.

Jerald, M.:

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Robinson, E.:

Uh-huh (affirmative).

Jerald, M.:

Did any of your sisters and brothers migrate up here with you later on?

Robinson, E.:

No.

Jerald, M.:

No. No. What was your message back to them about -- Did you have this attitude when you got here in Oak Ridge that you guys need to come up here?

[07:59]

Robinson, E.:

Yes. That's what I said to my brother, one of them.

Jerald, M.:

Uh-huh (affirmative).

Robinson, E.:

So finally he came, and he left here and went to Cleveland, Ohio.

Jerald, M.:

He bypassed you.

Robinson, E.:

He stopped though. But he went to Cleveland, OH.

Jerald, M.:

Uh-huh (affirmative).

Robinson, E.:

And he lived there all his life. And he died in November.

Jerald, M.:

This past November?

Robinson, E.:

Right.

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Jerald, M.: Yeah. I'm sorry to hear that.

Robinson, E.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Jerald, M.: Yeah. Was he older than you?

[08:25]

Robinson, E.: Oh, yeah. I was the youngest.

Jerald, M.: Oh, okay, okay.

Robinson, E.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Jerald, M.: But you asked him to come to Oak Ridge though didn't you?

Robinson, E.: Yes, I did.

Jerald, M.: Well, why did he bypass you?

Robinson, E.: Well, he said that they had started some kind of training in Mississippi, you know, for the African American peoples in the low incomes. And he had taken a training and working in a shop.

Jerald, M.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Robinson, E.: Uh-huh (affirmative). Okay.

Jerald, M.: Okay. So did he go to one of the automobile plants somewhere?

Robinson, E.: Yeah. In Cleveland, Ohio. That's where he worked. You're right.

Jerald, M.: Okay. Okay. Now K-25, when you saw all the lights and you saw the facility, did it overwhelm you?

[09:15]

Robinson, E.: Oh, yeah. I thought I done hit the big city.

Jerald, M.: Is that right?

Robinson, E.: Right.

Jerald, M.: Now did you know anything about any of the history of what they were doing here?

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Robinson, E.:

No. No.

Jerald, M.:

Nobody -- All it was was just people working?

Robinson, E.:

Peoples working.

Jerald, M.:

And making money.

Robinson, E.:

Making money. Because when I was there in Mississippi, I was making 25 cents, you know, a day.

Jerald, M.:

A day. What were you doing? I mean, you said farm work but doing what?

Robinson, E.:

Well, we picked cotton. We picked beans. I did all of that. That's when I say work won't hurt you. I tell my kids that.

[09:52]

Jerald, M.:

Right.

Robinson, E.:

Right.

Jerald, M.:

Yeah. Yeah. So when you showed up here, you stayed with your cousin?

Robinson, E.:

Yes, I did. I stayed with her and her husband.

Jerald, M.:

Okay. They had a home here?

Robinson, E.:

No. They was in a flat top.

Jerald, M.:

And that was one of the huts.

Robinson, E.:

Huts or something. Yeah, (Indiscernible) right.

Jerald, M.:

Okay.

Robinson, E.:

A little old bitty. It wasn't like -- Uh-huh (affirmative). Yeah.

Jerald, M.:

Talk about that.

Robinson, E.:

Well, I didn't like that because I was used to a big old house in Mississippi, because those houses are big and you know. Go out the front door to the back door. You know. And, but I said, "Well, daddy told me when you go out into the world, everything

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changes.” It’s what he told me when he put me on the bus.

Jerald, M.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Robinson, E.: He said, “And you always remember that.” So every time I think about where I was staying, I would think about what he told me to always do.

Jerald, M.: Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Okay.

Robinson, E.: So as I was here and I bought the paper, and I saw that job in there. And they interviewed me, and then I give them the peoples I had worked for in Mississippi and get their (Indiscernible). So they hired me. So then they told me when I just move in I don’t have to pay no rent, and all my money would be clear. You know. So I did that.

Jerald, M.: Okay. And you did that. That’s what you did for your start. (Indiscernible).

Robinson, E.: That’s right. That’s right.

[11:27]

Jerald, M.: Yeah. Now you’re staying in those huts. You were staying -- Was your cousin, was she married?

Robinson, E.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Jerald, M.: So her husband worked for K-25?

Robinson, E.: Her husband worked here. Uh-huh (affirmative).

Jerald, M.: Her husband worked for the reservation out there, right?

Robinson, E.: Right. Right. And his name was Louis Stowvald (phonetic sp.) and her name is Annie May. And she lives in Chicago.

Jerald, M.: Okay. So you lived in the little section that they call the pin.

Robinson, E.: Right. That’s right. [laughter]

Jerald, M.: Now we’re getting somewhere. [laughs] So that form of -- We’ll call it segregation. But that was a separation where family wise everybody had their rooms.

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Robinson, E.:

Right.

Jerald, M.:

The blacks had their rooms and the white had theirs.

[12:12]

Robinson, E.:

That's correct.

Jerald, M.:

Talk about that.

Robinson, E.:

And it was all -- It was all different, but it was better here than where I came from. That's right. And I, you know. Then I started to working for the judge and some more peoples, cause I never been arrested a day in my life.

Jerald, M.:

Uh-huh (affirmative).

Robinson, E.:

Down there or up here. I never got a ticket or anything. Okay. So I had no record, and I still don't have one. And I'm too old now to get one. [laughter]

Jerald, M.:

Well, I didn't expect you have a record. [laughs]

Robinson, E.:

But I'm just saying. You know, I'm just telling it all. Yeah. But it's pretty good you lived all these years and one time and never got a ticket. That's right.

Jerald, M.:

That's true. That's true. Now so when did you start working for the plant out here?

[13:14]

Robinson, E.:

I started working in '76.

Jerald, M.:

You started working in '76? Okay, when did you start -- What was your task of job out there?

Robinson, E.:

I started out in the cafeteria.

Jerald, M.:

In the cafeteria.

Robinson, E.:

Uh-huh (affirmative).

Jerald, M.:

Okay. So things were pretty relaxed at that time.

Robinson, E.:

Uh-huh (affirmative). That's right.

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Jerald, M.: It wasn't segregated then.

Robinson, E.: That's right. That's right.

Jerald, M.: Okay, so you remember when you came and it was segregation and then all the sudden things changed.

Robinson, E.: That's right. That's right.

Jerald, M.: So you -- What did you see about the change?

Robinson, E.: Well, I thought, I said, "Oh, Lord. Things is getting better for us." That's what I said.

[13:50]

Jerald, M.: Uh-huh (affirmative). Uh-huh (affirmative). So what -- You were still living with your cousins in the huts when the change came about?

Robinson, E.: No. I was living with Reverend C.C. Furlong.

Jerald, M.: Okay. Now you got married.

Robinson, E.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Jerald, M.: Okay. Is that the reverend?

Robinson, E.: Huh? I got married, but I didn't get married to him.

Jerald, M.: Okay.

Robinson, E.: But I got married, and then we got the house at 115 Balloon Circle.

Jerald, M.: Okay.

Robinson, E.: Okay.

Jerald, M.: Is that where you are now?

Robinson, E.: No. I'm on 102 Bettis Lane. We bought that house.

[14:27]

Jerald, M.: Okay. That's right. All Right. So the huts, you saw all the huts

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disappear.

Robinson, E.: That's right. Oh, Yeah.

Jerald, M.: You saw them disappear.

Robinson, E.: Right.

Jerald, M.: So tell me about the joy or the attitudes of the people when all that happened.

Robinson, E.: Oh, they was nice. You met nice peoples and you met some that wasn't too nice, but you looked over that and kept going and said, "Thank you Jesus." You know.

Jerald, M.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Robinson, E.: That's right. That's what I did.

Jerald, M.: Yeah. Well, I can tell a lot of you did, because I mean, all I've been meeting is nice personalities. Yeah.

Robinson, E.: Yeah. And then after I got married, I was working for Dr. Burs. And he asked me, he said -- They all call me Liza. "Would you like to work at the government? You'd make more money?" And he was working out there. And I said, "Yes, I would." He said, "Cause you got all those little kids." I said, "Yes, I would." So he told me to fill out a application. I give it to him, and the next week they called me out for an interview.

Jerald, M.: Yeah. Yeah. Okay.

Robinson, E.: And that's how --

Jerald, M.: That's how you got on.

Robinson, E.: That's how I got on. And I didn't have no record. You know. Uh-huh (affirmative).

Jerald, M.: Didn't have any bad traits.

Robinson, E.: Oh, no. Only bad check I had, I went to Chicago to visit my sister-in-law. And I was on line in the kitchen and so the FBI came in and he said, "Are you Miss Robinson?" And I said, "Yeah." Well, I didn't live there. I stayed there two weeks, but I worked. And he wanted to ask me what did I do in Chicago, and I told him.

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Because that wasn't on the record. You know, when they interviewed me.

Jerald, M.: Yeah. Yeah. But I mean, wait a minute. I'm losing track here. You went to Chicago.

Robinson, E.: Right. To visit.

[16:18]

Jerald, M.: And the FBI agent came to you?

Robinson, E.: Yeah. They came to me out to the plant at K-25.

Jerald, M.: Out to the plant.

Robinson, E.: Yeah. Right. Right.

Jerald, M.: Oh, okay. Okay. Okay. He was just following your tracks.

Robinson, E.: Right. Right. And see, I didn't put that on the application because I didn't live there. I was just visiting a week.

Jerald, M.: Yeah.

Robinson, E.: But she worked at a restaurant, so she let me help her, you know. And they paid me a check for working. So that's what -- uh-huh.

Jerald, M.: All right. All right. Now getting back to the plant and the huts and all that. How was it when you came here as far as recreation, social life, and how did you get around?

[16:59]

Robinson, E.: Oh, I got around on the bus. They had a bus that'd take you places. That'd run every day every so often in the hour, you know.

Jerald, M.: Okay, now. If you came up and you stayed with your cousin --

Robinson, E.: Uh-huh (affirmative). I did.

Jerald, M.: How did they fix that up and they were living in the huts? Did they say that -- And you wasn't working for the reservation. How did they arrange it to get you to live there in the huts?

Robinson, E.: Well, she told them that I come because I had just finished school

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so I could work and help my mother and dady. And that was the reason I came here.

Jerald, M.: Uh-huh (affirmative). So --

Robinson, E.: And I did that.

[17:39]

Jerald, M.: Cause I'm picturing that it was a family that lived in the huts and everybody had to be tied in to the reservation here.

Robinson, E.: Right. I lived there.

Jerald, M.: But in a way, you wasn't tied into the reservation.

Robinson, E.: No. Uh-Uh (negative).

Jerald, M.: So they let you.

Robinson, E.: Right.

Jerald, M.: Did you have to pay any rent? No, because you were staying with them.

Robinson, E.: I was staying with them, and I didn't pay any rent until I got a job.

Jerald, M.: Yeah.

Robinson, E.: And in two weeks, I got that and worked for the pharmacist.

Jerald, M.: That was good.

Robinson, E.: That's right.

Jerald, M.: That was a good thing.

[18:10]

Robinson, E.: Cause it didn't take them long to check my record. You know, the doctor. Cause I give him the peoples I worked for name that owned the store in Boonville, Mississippi.

Jerald, M.: Yeah.

Robinson, E.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

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Jerald, M.: Now when you started working out at the plant here, working conditions were pretty nice.

Robinson, E.: Oh, it was beautiful. I enjoyed it.

Jerald, M.: You enjoyed it?

Robinson, E.: That's right.

Jerald, M.: And didn't you say you were a taxi driver?

Robinson, E.: I was a taxi driver. That's right.

Jerald, M.: Okay.

Robinson, E.: I drove peoples where they wanted to go. And when they was sick and had to go home, I did that.

[18:44]

Jerald, M.: Okay. People that worked at the plant?

Robinson, E.: Yeah. That's what I mean. Uh-huh (affirmative). The ones --

Jerald, M.: Were people really friendly?

Robinson, E.: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

Jerald, M.: Supervisors all were friendly?

Robinson, E.: Right. Yeah. That's right.

Jerald, M.: Yeah. That's great. Now, so I guess you got better healthcare when you started working there.

Robinson, E.: That's right.

Jerald, M.: So how did you -- Healthcare. When you came here and you moved in with your cousin, did you have any problems about healthcare? Did you -- Did they help you out for healthcare? Could you get any healthcare from the government by living with them? Or how did that go?

Robinson, E.: No, I did not get any help from them.

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Jerald, M.: Okay.

Robinson, E.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

[19:28]

Jerald, M.: Oh, you just stayed healthy. Thank God.

Robinson, E.: Right. I stayed healthy, and I was working for the doctor that run the pharmacist downtown.

Jerald, M.: Yeah. Okay.

Robinson, E.: That's who I lived with.

Jerald, M.: So that was a help.

Robinson, E.: Right. Right there. That's right. I had no problem. They had a three bedroom.

Jerald, M.: Now, okay. All this is conspiring.

Robinson, E.: Right.

Jerald, M.: Sisters and brothers.

Robinson, E.: That's right.

Jerald, M.: What's happening with them?

Robinson, E.: Uh-huh (affirmative). Every one of them is dead but me.

Jerald, M.: Okay. But you were communicating back and forth with them, were you not?

[19:58]

Robinson, E.: Oh, yes I was.

Jerald, M.: Did at any time either one of your sisters or brothers come up here and stay with you any?

Robinson, E.: Yeah. My sister did. And she got killed in Cleveland, Ohio by a transfer truck.

Jerald, M.: Oh, that's an accident on the road.

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Robinson, E.: Yeah. Accident on the road. That's right.

Jerald, M.: Man, I'm sorry to hear that. So she --But she moved to Ohio.

Robinson, E.: Yeah. She moved to Ohio.

Jerald, M.: Okay. Okay.

Robinson, E.: Yeah.

Jerald, M.: So, here you are, and you were more or less a taxi person on the reservation. Can you recall taxiing any famous people?

Robinson, E.: Yes, I did.

Jerald, M.: Who did you taxi?

Robinson, E.: Ken Summersville.

[20:45]

Jerald, M.: Ken Summersville?

Robinson, E.: Yeah.

Jerald, M.: Who was he?

Robinson, E.: Plant manager.

Jerald, M.: He was the plant manager. Okay. And were there any other dignitaries like senators or presidents or anything you taxied?

Robinson, E.: No. No. Uh-uh (negative). Cause they had a car. They picked them up in a special car.

Jerald, M.: Special car?

Robinson, E.: Yeah.

Jerald, M.: Okay. But never did -- Did you ever see any of the presidents that come through? Did you have a chance to see them?

Robinson, E.: Yes, I did.

Jerald, M.: Did you?

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Robinson, E.: Yeah. Sure did.

Jerald, M.: I bet those were good times.

[21:18]

Robinson, E.: That was a good time. That's right.

Jerald, M.: Yeah.

Robinson, E.: And they'd taken my picture by the taxi that I drove.

Jerald, M.: Is that right?

Robinson, E.: Yeah.

Jerald, M.: Yeah.

Robinson, E.: So I got a big picture of that.

Jerald, M.: Yeah. I meant to ask you to bring that. Well, things worked out for you.

Robinson, E.: They sure did. Yes, they did.

Jerald, M.: Sisters and brothers kind of stayed back behind, and they continued to work hard on the farm?

Robinson, E.: That's right. That's right. Outside of the one that went to Cleveland, Ohio.

Jerald, M.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Robinson, E.: Uh-huh (affirmative). And I worked and saved up money, and I bought my mother and dad a house in Boonville, Mississippi.

[22:03]

Jerald, M.: Did you?

Robinson, E.: I sure did.

Jerald, M.: That was your mission.

Robinson, E.: Right.

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Jerald, M.: Your mission was what?

Robinson, E.: Was to help the one that helped me.

Jerald, M.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Robinson, E.: And that was my aim. That one that I called mother and dad. Uh-huh (affirmative). My mother died in childbirth, so that's the reason we were divided up.

Jerald, M.: Because you were the baby.

Robinson, E.: That's right. So I didn't know until I was two years old. I didn't know my mother. I did then, but you know.

Jerald, M.: Uh-huh (affirmative). I can imagine that.

Robinson, E.: Yeah.

[22:32]

Jerald, M.: Did you as far as doing things and getting that taxi job, that wasn't the first job you got out there.

Robinson, E.: No, it wasn't. I was working in the cafeteria.

Jerald, M.: So you went from the cafeteria to being a taxi driver.

Robinson, E.: That's right. That's right.

Jerald, M.: So who -- Did the doctor help you get the job at the cafeteria?

Robinson, E.: Yes, he did. And Wayne McLaughlin.

Jerald, M.: Okay. Okay.

Robinson, E.: You heard of him?

Jerald, M.: I've heard of McLaughlin. I've heard that name.

Robinson, E.: He was at K-25.

Jerald, M.: Okay. Okay.

[23:08]

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Robinson, Eliza

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Robinson, E.: And I bidded (phonetic sp.) on the job. So, it was a white lady that bidded on it, too. So, but I had more seniority than her. So they gave the job to her, because she knew how to drive a stick shift and I didn't.

Jerald, M.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Robinson, E.: But since they was having training at K-25 --

Jerald, M.: To do what?

Robinson, E.: To train peoples to do a job.

Jerald, M.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Robinson, E.: Then that's how I got it when Wayne McLaughlin stepped up and spoke. Then they had to train me how to drive a stick shift.

Jerald, M.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Robinson, E.: Which I wasn't driving one in the taxi, but they said you had to know how to drive it. That was the clue there. The reason they gonna' say that they give it to the white girl instead of me.

[24:04]

Jerald, M.: Okay. Okay. Even though the car didn't even have a shift in it.

Robinson, E.: No. And she wasn't driving no stick shift either, but I got it.

Jerald, M.: You got it.

Robinson, E.: I got it.

Jerald, M.: Okay. And that was more or less a promotion.

Robinson, E.: Right. And the union steward told them that they had -- We had to go to a meeting. And he told them the job. This is a training place out here. Since she got the job, and she's qualified. Then we'll train, that'd be another job. We had to training for to how to learn how to drive it. I did it.

Jerald, M.: Yeah. You did it.

Robinson, E.: That's right.

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Robinson, Eliza

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Jerald, M.: Now you got somebody. How many kids you got?

[24:44]

Robinson, E.: I have eight.

Jerald, M.: You got eight kids.

Robinson, E.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Jerald, M.: Now you got one -- You got a daughter that played professional basketball, right?

Robinson, E.: That's correct. Charlotte Robinson.

Jerald, M.: And they call her C.C.

Robinson, E.: C.C. Robinson.

Jerald, M.: C.C. Robinson. What -- Does she play right here in Oak Ridge basketball at high school?

Robinson, E.: Oh, yes she did. All the way up.

Jerald, M.: Yes, she did.

Robinson, E.: Uh-huh (affirmative). And she graduated from UT and then she went to Milwaukee, Wisconsin and played for the Milwaukee.

Jerald, M.: Now what I want you to do --

[crew talk]

[End of Tape 1]

Robinson, E.: I adopted my little granddaughter, so -- and raised her. So I called her one day. I was at work. I told her to put the dishes in the dishwasher. She said, "Oh, granny. I done that yesterday." I said, "But we done cook and eat again." You know. She said, "Oh, that's hard work." I said, "Honey." I said, "When I was coming up, mama didn't even -- We had to heat the water on the stove to wash the dishes in a pan." You know. But she thought just taking them out and putting in, that's hard work.

Male: And now it's all instant. Everything's automatic.

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Robinson, Eliza

Robinson, E.: Right. Oh, yeah.

Male: That's so character building. You know.

Robinson, E.: Right. But she --

Male: Doing it the old fashioned way. That's --

Robinson, E.: But she thought that was real hard work.

Male: Everyone's got it so easy now these days.

Robinson, E.: Oh, yeah. I told her I got another point.

Male: Oh, okay.

Robinson, E.: I just stay busy. I just keep moving.

Male: Okay. Well, with all that having said, let's get another 30 seconds of silence please. So if everyone could be quiet for just 30 seconds. Okay. That's great.

Jerald, M.: Now, Miss Robinson, your kids. You said you have how many?

Robinson, E.: Eight.

Jerald, M.: You got eight kids.

Robinson, E.: Outside of my little granddaughter. I adopted her and raised her. But I had eight of them, you know.

Jerald, M.: Okay. Talk about it.

Robinson, E.: Well, Charlotte. I have -- my oldest girl is named Charlotte Robinson, and they call her C.C. She played basketball, and she finished college. Then she went up north further to play basketball.

Jerald, M.: What college did she finish?

[02:08]

Robinson, E.: UT. UT Chattanooga. Uh-huh (affirmative). But she played ball up in here, all in around here. And she referees sometimes for other schools right now. She still do that. Uh-huh (affirmative).

Robinson, Eliza

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And she lives across the street from the Sherving (phonetic sp.) Museum when she came back to the state. And she bought that house over there. And she's added on and on and on. And she's got a big room with nothing but a basketball court in her house. Uh-huh (affirmative). She loved to play basketball.

Jerald, M.: Is that right?

Robinson, E.: Oh, yes. And, but now she's up in Gatlinburg at one of her --

Jerald, M.: Her Chalet?

Robinson, E.: Chalet. She has two. She has one in Gatlinburg and one up by the center, the casino there.

Jerald, M.: Which would be what? Cherokee?

Robinson, E.: Yeah. In Cherokee. She's got one up in there.

Jerald, M.: Do you ever go up?

[03:11]

Robinson, E.: No. I went to the one in Gatlinburg. I don't like mountains, so I tell her just call mama. So she came back last night to see how I was doing, and she went on back. She she's gone back up there.

Jerald, M.: Now, she played professional basketball.

Robinson, E.: Yeah. She did. Uh-huh (affirmative). Just a little bit. Then she went with them when they got ready to go overseas. She didn't like that.

Jerald, M.: Where did she play overseas? Can you recall?

Robinson, E.: I can't think of it. But she played in Milwaukee. She came back, and she played up there in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She played for the Bucks. And they wanted her to advertise the beer. Well, she won't -- wouldn't do it. She wouldn't do that because she said she was a Christian, and she couldn't pretend she was drinking beer on T.V. So -- and she quit.

Jerald, M.: Yeah.

[04:07]

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Robinson, Eliza

Robinson, E.:

And came back. She filled out an application while she was up there in Milwaukee, and they hired her at Y-12. And she worked out there, and then she just quit.

Jerald, M.:

Okay. Now you said that she's been inducted into the hall of fame.

Robinson, E.:

Yes. She has in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. Right here.

Jerald, M.:

Right here in Oak Ridge hall of fame.

Robinson, E.:

Right. That's right.

Jerald, M.:

You've got to be proud of that.

Robinson, E.:

Oh, yes. I am. I love my kids.

Jerald, M.:

Yeah.

Robinson, E.:

I've always been there for my kids. That's what everybody said. I'm for my childrens.

Jerald, M.:

Yeah.

Robinson, E.:

That's right.

Jerald, M.:

Now, we could approach closure, but I want to just ask you some things to make sure that I got your true story. Well, not your true story. Your whole story about just leaving. That's amazing --

Robinson, E.:

Uh-huh (affirmative).

Jerald, M.:

-- about leaving Mississippi and you leaving your family behind.

Robinson, E.:

That's right. That's right. It was. I came up to help my mother and dad. To give them a house and I did.

[05:20]

Jerald, M.:

You bought them a house.

Robinson, E.:

I bought them a house. I made enough money. And see, I never did drink or smoke, so I would save.

Jerald, M.:

Uh-huh (affirmative). Man, what was -- Describe when you went down and you brought that money down to buy that house, describe that for me.

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Robinson, Eliza

Robinson, E.:

Oh, my mother cried. I was the only one that did buy them something, you know. She just cried.

Jerald, M.:

How old were they at that time?

[05:52]

Robinson, E.:

My mother died, and she was 67 years old.

Jerald, M.:

How old were they when you bought her house.

Robinson, E.:

My mother was 54.

Jerald, M.:

So she enjoyed it for a few years.

Robinson, E.:

That's right. She enjoyed it. And I bought furniture and put in there for them, because they didn't have to take care of us but they did.

Jerald, M.:

Yeah.

Robinson, E.:

That's right. Because God is good, and all the time he's good. That's right.

Jerald, M.:

You got that right.

Robinson, E.:

That's right. So I came a long ways. I know all the ups (phonetic sp.) and the down. But I just -- When I get up every morning, the first thing I say when I open my eyes. I say to the good Lord, "And if it aint gonna happen today that you and I aint gonna straighten out." And when I start feeling anything wrong I say, "Well, Lord, here I am again." And I just take the whole day like that and everything just clear up. And God is good.

[06:51]

Jerald, M.:

You know, I can only imagine the stage, if I could say stage right, that you came up here by yourself.

Robinson, E.:

I sure did.

Jerald, M.:

In the 1940's.

Robinson, E.:

That's right.

Robinson, Eliza

Jerald, M.: Didn't even know exactly where you were going.

Robinson, E.: No, I did not.

Jerald, M.: That's --

Robinson, E.: I had never been out of the state of Mississippi when I came up here 'til I came here.

Jerald, M.: Man, that's --

Robinson, E.: And my cousin was up here. Her and her husband. And we was close when she was at home. She was older than me. She was always my oldest sister. Uh-huh (affirmative). And that's how I got up here.

Jerald, M.: Yeah.

Robinson, E.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Jerald, M.: Well, is there anything you want to expound on? Do you want to expound on the life after the huts or the creation of Scarborough community? Anything you want to express?

[07:55]

Robinson, E.: Well, right now Scarborough is where all it seemed like the ducks come to, that they need to do something about to help us out. Because most of all of the black folks are in Scarborough. And it's -- You know the situation of the young peoples are different from what it was when we was coming up. You know, drugs and everything is so bad out there. But I always go to the city council meeting. And I'm the one that bees on the news talking for the community. I'm the one.

Jerald, M.: Talk about it. See, I know you got something to say about this. And utilize this about the creation of Scarborough from the hut situation and where we are now.

[08:51]

Robinson, E.: Oh, we've come a long ways. Long ways from the hut. See, I wasn't in the hut so long cause they was getting ready to build these houses, and folks was buying the flat tops and things. And I went over. They was hiring different peoples to put down grass and stuff, you know. I even did that when I came and thought

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Robinson, Eliza

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nothing about it. I was just glad to have a job. And I saved my money and took care of my mom and dad.

Jerald, M.:

Ah, the Scarborough community, I'm out there quite a bit because I've been out there talking with you and a few of your other buddies and friends.

Robinson, E.:

Uh-huh (affirmative). Right.

Jerald, M.:

And I know what you're talking about, the problem.

Robinson, E.:

Right.

Jerald, M.:

Can you talk about how it has changed? Can you just talk about that a little bit?

[09:52]

Robinson, E.:

Oh, yes. It has changed a whole lot. When I first came here, I didn't have an air conditioner. And I slept with just a screen door, the wood door open and the windows cracked, but I wouldn't dare do that now for nothing. Cause you can't do that cause you're liable to not wake up. You're likely to get hit in the head or anything. You know. Right now. Where they wouldn't do that then.

Jerald, M.:

Now talk about they, who?

Robinson, E.:

The young folks. They wouldn't do that.

Jerald, M.:

That's the problem.

Robinson, E.:

That's the problem. But now the young peoples, most of them don't respect themselves let alone nobody else.

Jerald, M.:

It's -- You kind of find yourself wanting to take back your community, don't you?

Robinson, E.:

That's right. That's what I'm talking about. And this is one reason I always go to the city council. And I go to the meeting. And I speak up for the community and what we need is -- I told the chief about you know all the parkings (phonetic sp.) of the cars and loud music. And I said to him at the meeting if this was at your community, you would have ever police officer in Oliver Springs and Knoxville anywheres (phonetic sp.) to keep them from disturbing. I says, "So since we pay tax just like you all, then you

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should do the same thing for that -- this community.”

[11:29]

Jerald, M.: What is it that -- Why aint they doing that?

Robinson, E.: Well, this is what I go to the meeting and ask the question. And I said, “We pay your salary like everybody else. It’s not just the white man, it’s the black, they’re payin’ it. Everybody that lives in Oak Ridge is paying it.”

Jerald, M.: The statement was made by one of my interviewees --

Robinson, E.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Jerald, M.: -- that Scarborough area was set up not even as a part of Oak Ridge.

[12:09]

Robinson, E.: That’s right.

Jerald, M.: Talk -- Tell me about that.

Robinson, E.: Well, I just felt like they was doing it so much different and everything. And I just didn’t say too much on it. I would sit and listen, but it was a big difference.

Jerald, M.: They established what? A segregated community?

Robinson, E.: That’s what I feel like, cause that’s what at first they was just out here with black folks over in Scarborough.

Jerald, M.: Yeah.

Robinson, E.: That’s right. And you couldn’t -- They didn’t want you to move across town or nothing.

Jerald, M.: This is where you’re supposed to be?

Robinson, E.: Right.

[12:50]

Jerald, M.: Do you still feel that?

Robinson, Eliza

Robinson, E.:

No. Cause I feel like as I get on the news and say, I am free. I was free before I got here. I said, "And Abraham Lincoln, they blowed (phonetic sp.) his brains out." This is what I said to the city council. I said, "Because he freed the black, the poor white, the Jews, and the gentiles." And he did. And they blowed his brains out. And another thing that I always say, we got to look at it like this. When we die, white and black and all, everybody who's going to heaven going to be together. And everybody going to hell's going to be together, so why try to discriminate here on earth? Cause at the end, wherever you fall, you're going to be together. See, and the truth is the truth.

Jerald, M.:

Do -- Go ahead.

Robinson, E.:

And I said this at the meeting, I said, "We all need to face the facts." I said, "I am a black woman. And really, I've been free all of my life." I said -- And I was talking to the chief. I said, "You're a white man. You've been free." And I said, "The one's not free is my husband and your wife. But you and I are free. We've been free all our life to do anything we want to do." And that's the truth. Because right now, as I said, if they wouldn't caught my husband with a white woman then, they would have carried him somewhere and hung him. But if they'd a caught me with a white man, they'd a just laughed. You know? So that mean I was free. And a lot of folks won't speak up and say that, but I've always talked ever since I was young, because I seen all kind of hard times.

This is one reason is why I really came to Oak Ridge. My daddy lived on a farm, and back then he was a diabetic. So the doctor told him to stay off. The man we was on the farm for told my daddy that he had to go to work.

[15:13]

Jerald, M.:

This was --

Robinson, E.:

In Boonville, Mississippi.

Jerald, M.:

This is the guy that owned the farm that your daddy worked for.

Robinson, E.:

Right. That's right. And you know back then they didn't have the razors that you had like this. They had them -- my daddy had a razor like that.

[15:30]

Robinson, Eliza

Jerald, M.: Razor --

Robinson, E.: To shave with.

Jerald, M.: To shave with?

Robinson, E.: Right.

Jerald, M.: Now, but get back to you said your dad was sick.

Robinson, E.: Right.

Jerald, M.: But he -- The doctor wanted him to stay home, but the head guy wanted him to --

Robinson, E.: To go on. He said the cotton need tying. I was in the kitchen washing dishes. You listen to what I'm gonna tell you, and this is the truth. I went to the door. It was my last year in high school. I went to the door, and I said to him. His name was Jim Gilly (phonetic sp.). I said, "You are not my dad's daddy." I said, "The doctor told him to stay off it and not go out and farm." And he told me to shut up. And what did he do then? I let him know that he wasn't my daddy. And then I left ole' Boonville, Mississippi and came on up here.

[16:38]

Jerald, M.: So can I say that to better yourself, that was part of it, too?

Robinson, E.: That was part of it. That was part of it, too. And that's the reason I bought them the home, so they didn't have to stay on his farm or go on his place. I bought them that. It was one reason I was going to buy my daddy and them a place they didn't have to go and do when they didn't have to.

Jerald, M.: What conspired out of that conversation, if you can recall? Did that -- Was it more forceful? He told you to shut up, and that's what you did?

Robinson, E.: No, I did not. I just said I went and got my daddy's razor. That's what I said.

Jerald, M.: Oh. Okay.

Robinson, E.: And I told him I would cut his neck off his head and everything

Robinson, Eliza

else. And I left. But I told him I meant what I said, and I did.

[17:38]

Jerald, M.:

Now, you've done a great job. You've told some good stories.

Robinson, E.:

That's right. I told the truth. But I let him know he wasn't going to make my daddy go. Not when I'm living.

Jerald, M.:

Miss Liza, is there anything else you want to say that you done? This was a great interview.

Robinson, E.:

I would like to say this. When I was at K-25, some of the big wheels was real nice. When I was working in the kitchen, you know, we had a schedule. And I'd always say something silly, you know. And I'd say -- And they'd -- Mr. man was the plant manager. And I -- They said, "Liza, there's a man over there that wants you to bring him two cups of coffee." And I said -- I'm putting the dishes in the dishwasher. And I said, "I don't know nobody I'd stop for to bring him no coffee but Mr. Winkles." And they were Bob Winkle being the plant manager. And that was who it was. So, but I didn't know it was him. So I just kept on putting the dishes in there. And so my supervisor, he said, "Liza, that's him. That's who that is over there." And so I said, "Okay." So I picked him a big pot. I said, "Darling, how many pots do you want?" And they all started laughing. So when I come to work the next morning, they all had done got together in my group that worked in the kitchen. They had a big sign on the cafeteria, "Liza, Mr. Bob want you to bring a pot of coffee over to his office." You know. And everybody was teasing me about that, because I always would say something like, "If it's not so and so I aint gonna do it." You know. And they'd tease me about that.

Jerald, M.:

You know, one of the things when I look at -- when I go back to the interviews up to you --

Robinson, E.:

Yeah.

Jerald, M.:

And this includes the other people, coming here to Oak Ridge, even though it was an established, segregated community --

Robinson, E.:

Right. Yes.

Jerald, M.:

It was better than where you come from.

Robinson, E.:

A whole lot better. A whole lot better. A whole lot better. Cause

Robinson, Eliza

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the first job I got I stayed in the house, in that doctor's house.
They had three bedrooms.

[20:09]

Jerald, M.: Did it seem as though you had found comfort?

Robinson, E.: Yes. Yes. It sure did.

Jerald, M.: It was good.

Robinson, E.: It was good.

Jerald, M.: It was good.

Robinson, E.: And you know, driving that taxi I met a lot of nice peoples that I -- I met a lot that wasn't. And I know this man would always, everyday would want to go to the parlor, which we weren't allowed to do so, to take them at parlor at quittin' time. So he got on the taxi. He called from ten-thirty. So they sent me cause I'd always speak up. And I said, "Well, my supervisor said we can't take peoples to the parlor, to go home." And he said to me, "Do you know who I am? I'm Mr. Carbide." I said, "Well, if you's Mr. Carbide" I said, "You would have a car. You wouldn't need to call a taxi." You know. And I said, "I can't pick you up." And put the car in reverse and just backed up and went on back to the office. Cause I was told not to pick it up. And I said, "I can't lose my job giving you a ride." I said, "Because I got eight kids to take care of."

[21:25]

Jerald, M.: And he was no Mr. Carbide.

Robinson, E.: No, cause I told him -- Cause I said to him. He said, "Do you know who I am?" I said, "No, and it really don't make a difference." But I said, "I know your name, cause you have to put it on the book." And I said, "But my supervisor said we can't take peoples to the parlor to go home at four-thirty."

Jerald, M.: Uh-huh (affirmative). Well, all right. I think this has been great. I think you've done a great job.

Robinson, E.: Oh, I tried to.

Jerald, M.: I enjoyed interviewing you.

Robinson, Eliza

Robinson, E.: Yeah.

[21:58]

Jerald, M.: This is a great story.

Robinson, E.: Yeah. I'm telling the truth.

Jerald, M.: Oh, man. Nobody doubt that. And --

Robinson, E.: Cause I was always afraid of thunderstorms. I want to say this. And when I was driving a taxi, I didn't like driving. And Dr. Fortley (phonetic sp.) was out there who had been my family doctor and delivered my kids. And I said, "Oh, Lord." I said, "It's thundering." And I didn't want to go across that water over that bridge again go to pick up them folks, you know. I said well, the only thing I can do is just say I'm sick. I'd go into the medical (Indiscernible). And Dr. Fortley said, "Liza, I can't find a thing wrong with you." I said, "But you just aint looking at the right place doctor." He said, "Oh, my God." He talked like that. He said, "Oh, my God. Let Liza go in there and sit down." I called him the other day, you know, to see how he was doing. And he said, "Well, Liza, it's good to hear your voice." He said, "Last time I heard it," he said, "when you was down at medical not wanted to drive 'til the thunder." He said, "You'd always get well when it cleared up." I said, "That's right."

[23:01]

Jerald, M.: Let me ask you this. How was the spouses and kids? What did you think about the education system?

Robinson, E.: Well, when I came here, I went over to the high school at night. I got a babysitter to keep my kids after I started to work. I didn't have but two then. And I would -- I took up key punching. And I had all of that when I went to the plant. You know. And I told them, "No. I don't want to be in this position, you know, during no weekly stuff." You know. I said, "Cause when you're doing weekly stuff, you can't really be outspoken." And I said, "Now I am --" I really speak what I want to say. And I says, "So I couldn't be there." I says, "So I have to stay hourly so I have my other rights." I said, "I got one right to being free, and I'll have to have my other rights to speak."

Jerald, M.: Uh-huh (affirmative). And that's being hourly.

Robinson, Eliza

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[24:04]

Robinson, E.: Right. That's being hourly. So they just laughed it off, you know.

Jerald, M.: But the education --

[crew talk]

Male: If you've got any more stories about Mr. Winkle too, I'd love to hear them. I interviewed him.

Robinson, E.: You did?

Male: Yeah.

Robinson, E.: I bet he remembered Liza. They laughed. [laughter] But he was nice though.

Jerald, M.: Miss Liza, the education for families when you first arrived in Oak Ridge staying within the huts, was it satisfiable (phonetic sp.)?

Robinson, E.: Oh, yes. Cause you know, that was the best they could do. And I was just glad to be, you know.

Jerald, M.: Glad to be here.

Robinson, E.: Right. And glad to be where I could help my mother and dad. Uh-huh (affirmative).

[25:49]

Jerald, M.: Well, --

Robinson, E.: And God always provides. He always, all the time. All the time. Because you know, I went through a whole lot that some other folks couldn't have done. Four years ago I had a son that take a car and run over his brother. And see, I'm still here. I left all of that in the air. I just kept praying to God, and I'm still here. I had to stay in the hospital a while, but I got out of there. And everybody was so nice to me. And everybody I worked for is. And just like last month, you know, when I was telling you about I got robbed. All the folks I used to work for cleaning house brought me money.

Jerald, M.: Yeah.

Robinson, Eliza

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Robinson, E.: So if I hadn't have been nice, they wouldn't have done that.

Jerald, M.: Uh-huh (affirmative). Uh-huh (affirmative).

Robinson, E.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

[crew talk]

[27:10]

Jerald, M.: I'm sorry Miss Liza. Tragedy.

Robinson, E.: Right.

Jerald, M.: With the sons.

Robinson, E.: Right. I had tragedy. He take his girlfriend's car and ran over his baby brother. Uh-huh (affirmative).

Jerald, M.: Well, --

Robinson, E.: And I just keep going cause I look at it like this. That God doesn't have any problem. And the problems I have I just turn it over to his hand, and I just keep going.

Jerald, M.: All right. Do you have nieces and nephews and down in Mississippi now?

Robinson, E.: Yes, I do. I have one son down there, and he's a minister. He got a big Baptist church in New Albany, Mississippi.

Jerald, M.: You've got to be proud of him.

Robinson, E.: Oh, yeah. He comes up often. He calls me every week.

[28:06]

Jerald, M.: Is that right?

Robinson, E.: Yeah. Uh-huh (affirmative).

Jerald, M.: Yeah. They got to think an awful lot of you, too.

Robinson, E.: Oh, yeah.

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Robinson, Eliza

Jerald, M.:

I think you're a great person.

Robinson, E.:

I try my best to be. And you know, the peoples before I got on at the plant that I used to work for, you would be amazed. They pay me now just like I worked.

Jerald, M.:

Oh, really?

Robinson, E.:

And they gonna pay me as long as I live they said.

Jerald, M.:

Is that retirement?

Robinson, E.:

No. You know, they didn't take nothing. I was cleaning house and keeping the kids. So what they paid me then, they still pay me and I don't work. And they said they'll pay me as long as I live. And I worked 38 years at St. Steven Episcopal Church. Every Wednesday night. Helped support my kids.

Jerald, M.:

That's a blessing.

Robinson, E.:

And the minister then, I just got a check the other day. On the 18th of every month, she sends me a check. Every month. And she's been doing it for the last five years. And I get it on the 18th of every month.

Jerald, M.:

That's nice.

Robinson, E.:

That's right.

Jerald, M.:

Well, now okay. Anything? We can bring it to a close.

Robinson, E.:

Okay.

Jerald, M.:

If there's anything that you want to expound on.

Robinson, E.:

No. I just wanted to tell you that about how God takes care of problems. And I told you that about my son.

Jerald, M.:

Right.

Robinson, E.:

Uh-huh (affirmative).

[29:41]

Jerald, M.:

I'm with you as far as the Scarborough community. Like I was saying earlier, I'm out there. And I see exactly what you were

Robinson, Eliza

talking about with the young kids.

Robinson, E.:

Right.

Jerald, M.:

And hopefully for the community, because there's a lot of history with that community.

Robinson, E.:

Right. Yes it is.

Jerald, M.:

And it's a shame to see where it's headed.

Robinson, E.:

That's right. They've taken over. They'd be all in front of your door all night long.

Jerald, M.:

Right. We'll talk about that some other time.

Robinson, E.:

Okay.

Jerald, M.:

So I appreciate you.

Robinson, E.:

Okay.

Jerald, M.:

All right. Thank you much.

Robinson, E.:

Okay.

[End of Interview]