

Novak Digital Interview Collection: Detroit Migration Series

INTERVIEW INDEX-LADONNA BYRD

Interviewee: LADONNA BYRD, Single mother of five and a Credentialing specialist living in Detroit, MI

Date of Birth: April 25, 1960

Place of Birth: Lincoln Park, Michigan

Interviewer: Karmen Byrd

Interview Date: March 27, 2008

Location: LaDonna Byrd's home in Detroit, MI

Tape No.: 03.27.08-LB (audio digital file)

(approximate total length 52 minutes)

Topic: LaDonna Byrd is a single mother of five children living in Detroit, MI. This interview recounts her younger years living in Detroit and the difficulty of dealing with the early loss of her parents. Also, how moving back to Detroit, Michigan from a safer Burlington, Vermont has changed her life.

Subject

Headings: Life Experiences. Detroit, MI: Byrd

Comments: Only italicized text is verbatim; all other text is paraphrased, including the interviewer's questions. Counter index corresponds to track times when loaded into Windows Media Player.

INTERVIEW INDEX

Counter Index Topic

Note: Counter index corresponds to track times when loaded into Windows Media Player

0:00 When were you born and where were you raised? Ladonna was born on April 25, 1960 in Lincoln Park Michigan which she just found out recently when she went to apply for a passport. All of this time she thought she was born in Detroit, but she was raised in Detroit for the most part of her life.

1:13 What was it like growing up in Detroit? She enjoyed her early childhood. She had fun playing outside and riding her bike until the street lights came on. She would get in trouble if she was not home before the street lights came on. She had to rub her mother's feet when she arrived home from work and tried to do so as quickly as possible so she could go back outside. *My most favorite time as a child was Christmas.* She loved Christmas because of everything that was going on around her and because her house was the house to come to. She did not receive many presents because she was the sixth child of seven. These are the good things about her childhood that she remembers and feels her childhood was cut short do to a tragic accident.

5:03 What were your parents like? Her mother was a dietitian and worked in a hospital in Lincoln Park. Her father was an electrician and they both worked hard.

6:10 Do you mind elaborating on the tragic event that took place? When she was seven years old after Christmas her parents, her oldest brother and his wife drove her grandfather back to Georgia. On their return trip a Dole Banana truck had jack knifed in the middle of the road and failed to put out hazard signs. Her parents did not see the truck and ran right into it. The car immediately burst into flames and everyone was killed except for her brother's wife who was thrown from the vehicle.

8:16 How did the accident effect life afterwards? She went from being happy and having fun to being miserable. Her now oldest brother tried to take care of her and her baby brother, but things did not work out. Family members started to move away from their then home. She and her baby brother moved in with her uncle and aunt which whom she really did not like. *To me I felt my aunt was resentful, hateful, vengeful, and just mean.* She felt she took this all out on her. Her aunt was raised in times when woman did everything and the men worked, so she was forced to cook, clean, and wash clothes. Things got worse for her when her uncle left, leaving her and her brother to their aunt who was not their blood relative.

14:45 What were the 70's like? The 70's were her teenage years. She was still in Southwest Detroit and attended River Rouge High. The black elementary schools were on one side of the railroad tracks, and the white middle schools were on the other side. River Rouge High school was the only high school, so blacks and whites had to go to school together. She had her first boyfriend and her aunt liked him, so she was allowed to date him.

21:13 The 70's were good times. They wore hot pants and bell bottoms. Hot pants were shorts that they wore under these mini dresses. *I think they were called hot pants because they were short.* She finally realized before her senior year of high school that if she stayed with her aunt she would become crazy. One night she was angry and was pacing her room talking to herself. When she started to answer herself she knew then and there it was time to go. She ran away from her aunt's house that night because she was tired of the way she was being treated and fearful of becoming crazy. She ended up staying with her brother and finishing school. She went on to attend Wayne State University. She graduated from college with a Bachelor's degree.

29:00 How did marriage and children change your life? She felt after she got married she realized she was not ready for marriage. She felt like her aunt affected her and caused her to cling to her husband. She dealt with things because she did not want to go out and look for someone else.

33:28 Throughout marriage she had five wonderful children that did make marriage more difficult. She did not think she could take care of her kids without his help, so she tried to stick it out. It was a bad relationship and a bad marriage. Divorce has helped her grow and accomplish more things. She hopes she has made a good example for her children.

36:11 What was it like moving away from Detroit? After marriage her family moved to Vermont because of her husband's job. Moving to Vermont was a culture shock considering Vermont is predominantly white. Vermont was very different from Michigan. In Vermont they pump their gas first then pay and in the banks there isn't Plexiglas, so you could talk to the teller face to face. She enjoyed living in Vermont because her children were able to play outside and she did not have to worry about her children being kidnapped like parents in Michigan and larger cities did. She lived in Vermont for ten years and then returned back to Detroit, Michigan.

41:58 How did the move back to Detroit affect the family? When she visited Detroit while living in Vermont she always felt a sense of anxiety and moving back made it worse. She moved back in November of 1997 because her husband wanted to be closer to his family. She does feel like moving back to Detroit was a great decision and worked out well for her and her children. She has been able to accomplish many things and her children are all doing well in school.

46:13 Do you have any regrets? She does not have any regrets because she feels everything she has been through has made her the person she is today and she likes that person.

46:38 Do you have any worries? (Crying) Her major worry is for her children. She really wants to be in their lives through everything. She was unable to have her parents around for everything she went through, so she really wants to be around for her children. She wants to be supportive, and see all of them graduate and get married. She wants them to be independent and supportive of each other.

50:48 Is there anything else you would like to talk about? No, that is it.