

Interview transcript, Maxine Early interview, February 23, 2012

Novak Digital Interview Collection: Detroit Migration Series

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT - MAXINE EARLY

Interviewee: MAXINE EARLY
DOB: 11/28/40
Interviewer: Crystal Christian
Interview Date: February 23, 2012
Location: home of Maxine Early Southfield , MI
Tape No.: 02.23.2012-ME (audio digital file)
(Approximate total 18 minutes)

Summary: Maxine Early is interviewed by Marygrove student Crystal Christian about her family's migration to Detroit in the early 1940s. Ms. Early's father moved to Detroit to find a job so he could support his family. About a year later he sent train tickets to his wife and children in Mississippi and they joined him in Detroit. Growing up, Ms. Early's house was a hub for extended family members who used it as a temporary residence after coming from the south to Detroit. In the south, the migrants said, people are "warmer" and friendlier; in the north, teachers assumed the children were behind in their work because they were from the "country" and held them back a grade.

Subject Headings:

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Note: Counter index corresponds to track times when loaded into iTunes

0:00

Interviewer: The interviewer is Crystal Christian. The interviewee is Maxine Early. Today's date is Thursday February 23, 2012. The place is Maxine Early's home. I've explain the consent form to Maxine Early and I would like to know Maxine I did explain the consent form to you and do you agree to this interview?

Yes I do.

Interviewer: Okay, Maxine how far can you trace your family tree?

0:46

Well I can go back at least four generations to my great great grandmother and grandfather.

Interviewer: Okay um and where were they born?

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Well I can't tell you where they were born because I know it was Mississippi but I'm not sure both of them were born in Mississippi but that was where all the family was, it was four generations ago, they were in Greenfield Mississippi.

Interviewer: and when and where were you born?

I was born in Hughes Arkansas in um 1940.

1:26

Interviewer: Hughes Arkansas and where did you grow up.

Well when we came to Detroit I was two years old so I grew up here even though my family up until that time, where we grew up in Arkansas, in a city called Hughes it's near Little Rock, but it kind like what they call in the country, back not in the big city, and I'm not even sure if Hughes is even on the map now, it might have been absorbed.

1:49

Interviewer: And what year did you come to Detroit?

We came to Detroit in 1942.

Interviewer: And what was that like?

Well I was just two years old and moved on the Northeast side of Detroit, by the Davison Dequindre area and my father came here first I'm not sure but I think my father they said my father came here about ten or eleven months before he sent for my mother, cause it was seven kids, seven kids at that time and he sent and then we came after, after my father got a job.

2:32

Interviewer: You came from.

We came from Arkansas, we came from Hughes Arkansas. But my father came here first and he got a job and his brother was here and lived with his older brother and he got him a job in the factory called Longs manufacturing. It was on Dequindre near Davidson. But it was no longer Longs manufacturing now, but it was when my father came and they rented a house on Hallick street where he could walk to work.

Interviewer: And why did your father come to Detroit.

3:07

My father came to Detroit because he had seven kids and he was a share cropper down South and um he had to make a living for us and he heard that they were hiring up here in

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Detroit in the factories. So he didn't get in the automotive factory right away he went to another factory called Longs. I guess they fed into Ford. And then later on he got a job at Ford motor company and was better able to take care of his family because all total we ended up with nine kids but it was seven at the time.

3:44

Interviewer: Okay so you said that your father came here first with your uncle and he worked at another company before he worked at Ford motor company.

Yes that's right

Interviewer: Now he came here by himself without your family, without your mom and your other siblings.

4:04

Right, because he didn't have anywhere for us to live so he lived with his brother his older brother had already come to Detroit. So then he came to Detroit and he brought um and he came and then after he saved up some money and they found a house for us to live in to rent near the house was near the factory because it was only ten houses from the factory that we lived. Then he called for the rest of the family. And then about they said my Daddy saved the money, and I remember they said he bought the house, he bought the house we lived in about which was one street over which was about ten houses from the factory, but he bought the house for four thousand dollars. With a three bedroom house and he and his brothers put three more bedrooms upstairs so we had six bedrooms and everybody who came here from down South, lived in that same house because he would bring other families, his other brothers and sisters as they would come they would live in the house until they got a job. So we had several families that all of his family eventually got here. My mother and my father's family lived with us in this same house until they got on their feet until they moved on. So everybody lived with us first.

5:22

Interviewer: Now how did you get to Detroit your mom and your siblings did your mom drive here, did your father come back to Arkansas to get you.

My father didn't come back to get us he sent train tickets, we came here on the train. I remember them saying we packed lunches and food and they brought cake and food and chicken and stuff we all road the train here when my father could send for them. Um huh and that's how my mother and the rest of us got here.

Interviewer: So once you got here as a child how was your childhood once you came to Detroit from Arkansas was that a big difference? The two places were they different to you?

I don't recall too much about it because I was two years old so I don't know how Arkansas was. But my sisters and brothers the ones who were older than me, cause I was the uh next to the youngest one was born in Arkansas and then so I don't I was two years old but I mean my sisters brothers told me how difficult it was because people were warmer the few people that they knew were warmer and when they got here and went to school they put them back. They put them all our kids back. They called them Clark kids It was so many of us. They put them back because they thought they were not they were behind, and they never tested them to see if they were behind.

6:43

They just automatically put the Southern kids behind, only to discover later on that they were even ahead of the kids in their grades, but they got put behind. And they didn't say it was much fun when they came because they said the kids made fun of them. They made fun of the way they talked they called them country. And they didn't know nothing cause they weren't exposed to movie theatres and libraries and they weren't and they weren't exposed to and after school recreation. Their schools were smaller and they were I guess you call country kids I don't know. But they were not, their early childhood was not fun, from what I heard.

7:18

Interviewer: Okay can you explain to me what do you mean by warmer, they were warmer. Where warmer and the people act warmer towards you in Arkansas or they act warmer towards you when you got to Detroit?

Well they were warmer in Arkansas even though they didn't live close, it is my understanding that the neighbors didn't have a house right next door because they share crop they live there and my father would work the fields and who ever owned they gave them part of the money and they had part of the money. And but the people when they did see them at the church and stuff they were just warmer. But here they were kind of like country that's what they called them country. And they didn't make friends with real easy with them.

Interviewer: Because you were country?

Yes they said they we were country.

Interviewer: What's country.

Well country is at that time was people who talk with a Southern accent. They said they thought you were ignorant because you didn't talk like the people who were up North and the grammar probably was better. But the accent and because they didn't know they weren't exposed to as many things as the kids here, so they felt like they were dumb, their backwards they're from the country. Country meaning like we live somewhere with no shoes and just a backward generation but that was not the case, but that's how they were treated because it was so many. It was like okay they got seven kids already, and they said have one on the way, and that was country to the Northern people and that's the only way I can tell you what country is.

9: 01

Interviewer: Now where is your mom's family from?

Her family was from Greenville Mississippi. They were all born, they were the Newsome's a big huge family but they all migrated to Chicago and my father brought my mother to Detroit. So we had a lot of relatives in Chicago. And those were the two cities that you left the South you went Chicago or to Detroit.

Interviewer: And your father, where was your Dad from.

He was from; my Dad was from Macao Mississippi. Macao and my mother was from Greensville Mississippi.

Interviewer: Oh okay. And how did your parents meet. Because they were from two different um.

Well in those days you went where work was. You went to share crop you went on just where ever you could find work. My mother was born in Alabama even though her family was from Mississippi and my daddy's family was from Mississippi. But you went where the work was. Wherever they said work was you packed up your family and that's where you went to work. And somehow I guess they met. I do know they weren't close. My daddy had to walk quite a long way to get to where my mother was share cropping. But that's how a man went to seek his wife some other place.

Interviewer: Okay you said your mom was Alabama and your dad was from Macao Mississippi and they were share croppers and then you had let's see and your father would had to walk quite a ways to meet your mom. And so can you kind explain to me share cropping?

Well all I know at that time they said that they you get part of the money when you worked the fields. The kids even worked the fields , I was too young to work the fields but they worked the fields my mother' family worked the fields and they probably met in the fields somewhere.

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Interviewer: Okay do you remember any stories or jokes you can remember that they would tell you?

Well we didn't have a lot, I don't know what they did so I really don't if they shared a lot. I just remember the Detroit stories. Things here family traditions, like I said I was only two years old.

Interviewer: Can you tell me a little about your family traditions?

11:50

Well we didn't have a lot, I don't know what they did. So I just remember the Detroit stories or things here family traditions here. Like I said I was only two years old.

Interviewer: Okay family traditions. Can you tell me a little about some of your family traditions?

Well um family I would say our family was real close we had a big family ending up havin nine children. And like I said, my mother and fathers family all migrated and they came to Detroit because my father's house was the house where everybody would come, when they came to Detroit. And you live there with your whole family. And we only had a three bedroom house. But then he and his brothers made three more bedrooms upstairs in the attic. So when people came here we had family after family. When one family get on their feet, get a job in the factory, they move and another family would come but the tradition was that we always get together on Holidays. And plus we have a family who believe in church. So you grew up in the church and stayed in the church. Even to this day my family you just pass on down, you go to church that's where you get your strength. And that help you to become what you are and to get your first exposure. That was a tradition. I wouldn't call it a tradition, that was just a way of life for us. You had to go to church. And your life centered around church activities. So and that's all I can say.

Interviewer: Okay um did you have any nicknames?

Oh yes my nickname was sister.

Interviewer: Sister?

The older people called me sister babe.

13:12

Interviewer: How did you get that?

Well every family got a sister down South. Some person in that family is going to be called sister down South and one of them girls is going to be called sister and one of

those boys is goin to be called brother and one children going to be called baby. Cause that's just something about it, it's sister, brother, babe and junior and somebody is going to be called junior. And in my family we have a tradition because my father's name is R.L. just capital R period and capital L. period. So he had a son he named E.L. So it was just a generation carried on. But I do know my brother didn't like his name being just two initials E.L. And later when he went to the service he legally changed his name to Edward Lee. Because he said that they said what kind of name is E.L. And he said my dad's name is R.L. So that was just a joke everybody talks about how many other L's you all got. But you know we have holidays we still do all the big Thanksgiving we still do all Christmas and all of that. In terms of traditions we don't really have any traditions.

Interviewer: Okay so you saying that when you guys moved here from Arkansas it was like a family tradition so to speak that everybody who moved lived with you family.

That's right. I guess that is a tradition. Cause that what they did because we had six bedrooms we had, they three and we had a huge attic and he and his brother, my father he had five, six brothers they would build out the bedrooms, so when somebody come they would have somewhere to live. He had nine kids but still somehow I can't even recall where did everybody sleep. But I do not recall everybody sleeping on top of each other. And I don't ever remember but two people in my bed that I was in. But yet and still I often think where did everybody sleep? Because our family only had the downstairs which were only three bedrooms my mother and family had the first one, there were only two more but I had brothers. But we did have a basement but I don't recall anybody ever sleeping, I really don't know where they all slept. But I know we always had extra families up stairs. We didn't have the luxury of until later sleeping, as a matter of fact; I do recall my brothers now sleeping upstairs, It probably between families coming. Because it always seemed like we had a family coming from down South look like somebody was always coming. I don't recall us living on top of each other. So how that worked out I don't know.

Interviewer: Have ever gone back to Arkansas?

I went to Arkansas one time when my mother's brother who was in the service passed away he was in the war he was in the service. And I went to Arkansas when I was in my late twenties, I was married then. I went Arkansas for the funeral. Now I gone back to Greenville. See now Arkansas was not our home that's just where we were born, the kids we were all born in Arkansas cause that's where my mother met my father. The family her whole family is in Greenville Mississippi and my daddy's family was in Mississippi but he didn't have a big family, so and that's why we go to family reunions we go to Greenville Mississippi for reunions.

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Interviewer: So would that be considered one of your traditions also that you get together for your family reunions.

Yes.

Interviewer: And how often do you do that?

About every two years.

Interviewer: Every two year?

Um Huh.

Interviewer: Do you have them only in Detroit or do you travel different places?

17:00

Generally it's Mississippi, Greenville. Then two years later we go to one of the other cities like Chicago. And then it will go to Detroit. And then we have one in Baltimore, Maryland. And then it's back to Mississippi again. It will always go back to Mississippi. Even if we go to Chicago we still go back to Mississippi two years later, because that's where the family is originally from. And my grandmother had um eleven brothers. So the family is a very large family and my mother's mother had eleven brothers. So they all are Newsome's and they all live in Chicago area. And some live in Gary, Indiana. And some Benton Harbor, or Benton something not Benton Harbor, but something with a Benton in it. But we go back to Mississippi because that's where the biggest family is from. My mother, my grandmother came here to Detroit because she was the sister so all her brothers went to Chicago. So we see them because they come to see their sister.

Interviewer: Um you were saying that your family came here and every family that had came to Detroit they had all lived with your family. Um you do have family tradition, and family reunions in Detroit, Chicago and Mississippi. Your mom has eleven brothers, and she the only girl that came to Detroit.

My mother's mother had eleven brothers. My grandmother had eleven brothers.

Interviewer: Okay and your mother's mother had eleven brothers?

Right.

Interviewer: And she's the girl, she's the only one that came to Detroit. And everyone else had gone to Chicago.

Her husband brought her to Detroit.

Interviewer: Oh okay.

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Because he brought her to Detroit.

Interviewer: Okay well thank you for this interview, I appreciate your time and um.

Well thanks you for asking me and thanks for being interested in my family. I don't know that we are very interesting but we are a proud family. And we are proud of our family and our heritage.

Interviewer: Well thank you so much Mrs. Early.

You are welcome.

19:42