

Transcript
“Home Is Where I Make It”:
African American Community and Activism in Greater Portland, Maine
Interview: Rose Jackson
Date: 31 March 2001
Location: Portland, Maine

This is the “Home Is Where I Make It” oral history project. Today is March 31, 2001 in Portland, Maine. I am Hamida Suja (H-a-m-i-d-a S-u-j-a), and I am interviewing Mrs. Rose Jackson. Mrs. Jackson, thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this project. For the record, can you please spell your first and last name for me?

My name is Rose Jackson. Ro-s-e is Rose. And J-a-c-k-s-o-n. And I live in South Portland.

Thank you. I’d like to begin by asking you some biographical questions. When and where were your born?

I was born in Louisville, Mississippi.

Can you tell me something about your family background?

Almost all of them is dead and gone now. But I had a lovely father, very tall, near about seven feet. And I had a mom, three sisters, and two, three brothers. We had a farm. We used to work on the farm, raising our food: potatoes, corn, cotton. I loved it. We had our own animals: pigs, cows, horses. And sometime we had to go to the spring to get water; if we couldn’t draw it out of the well. And, you know, I can actually say, it was the good old days. Because we really didn’t have to worry about guns, peoples getting shot, getting killed. Everybody loved one another. The neighbors next to us was white. And if something go wrong with them we were right there with them, and they same with us, the way they did us. If my mom got, sick the lady would nurse my mom’s baby on her breast, and vice versa; the lady would do it to my mom. And it was just wonderful. And we would get together, like, have a fish fry on the weekend with our white friends, our white neighbors. And when we would get out and fish, my daddy and

them would go down and get in the water and just muddy the water up with hoes—what you chop cotton with—and the fish would come to the top of the water. And they would get the fish out. And we would clean them and we'd cook them. And that's the reason I call it the good old days. Nobody bothered us. We had church to go to that next Sunday. They went to their church, we went to ours, but—it was wonderful.

Can you tell me your parents' names and something about them?

Well, my father's name was Willie O Clayton Hathorne. My momma's name was Bertha Ophelia Hathorne; her maiden name was Young. I loved both of them, but I was close to my dad, real close to my dad. He always took time for me. And I remember that the only thing I didn't like about my father is when they killed the pigs. [laughter] Of course, you know, they had to kill them to get the lard for us to cook with. And my mom, she was a good cook and she worked in the field along with my dad. We had good upbringing. We had to walk to school or else ride our horses. We had one horse—her name was Daisy—we could ride. Like three or four of us on horses. She would get down and let us get on her back and things like that. Sometimes we had a few little incidents, like other children were jealous of us because we had more than they had, you know. But we'd just tell them that if they come go home with us and eat with us, stuff like that. Some of them would get angry and say, 'Oh y'all think you're better than us; I don't want your food.' You know, but we'll say, 'Well, I just done what my pappa tell us to do—be nice to peoples—regardless if you got some or don't have some.' Because hunger hurts, in any race. I think about my oldest sister: she's been sick her whole life and we didn't know. She's married and got 9 children now. She has lupus. Be some Black folk who don't live with lupus, but my sister is 68, 69. She lives in Windham, here in Maine. She's got 6 girls and 3 boys. And God has been so good to her, because you imagine somebody with lupus that long and still living. That's what we have to do. And I had another sister.

What is lupus?

I really don't know, but it's a sickness that goes along with the—what do they call it now—something to do with the breathing. And it's not TB, but it's like you can't hardly breathe

and stuff like that. You swells up. I remember a long time ago we used to work in the field and I would keep the baby in the shade. And my sister would go and help my dad; soon as she get out there her nose would start bleeding. And we didn't know what it was then because it was a long time ago. But as it grew, the doctors knowed better. And so what I did, I asked my dad, 'Dad, would you please let her babysit and let me do the work in the field?' and we reversed it. And that way, she stopped being sick. You know. And my brothers would plow and hoe with mules and the horses. And my grandmother—Oh, God rest her soul. She was part Indian, my dad's mom. She was one of the sweetest women; she was so good to me. It's okay to tell what happened when I was little, right?

Yeah.

Okay, well, I was very, very fast. You know, everything had to go my way. Well, my grandmother had this big turkey; his name was Tom. And my nickname is 'baybay,' come to think of. So she'll say, 'Baybay, leave that turkey alone before he hurt you.' 'Oh Tom ain't gonna hurt me, Tom won't hurt me.' Okay, I kept on messing with Tom and I hurt him somewhere or another. And he split my back from here down to here. And I cried. Tom felt sorry for me, you would think. You know it's funny how pets will do. He felt so sorry for me that he opened all of us big wings up and put it 'round me.

So he opened up his wings. I was crying, and he put his wings around me. And he would [clucking sound]; he was letting me know I loved him, but leave me alone. I was a tomboy; oh, I was a tomboy. Then another thing happened to me. My dad had an old car. Dad was in the field plowing. And I started the car up, and I must have been 8 or 9 years old. Started the car up and couldn't stop it. 'Round the house I went. My mom run to the field and got my dad. He run back home on the horse. Jumped on the running board and stopped. Long years ago—you people is too young to know about it—you had a running board to jump on. And he pulled it out of the crank and told me, 'Don't ever do that again.' My dad didn't like to whup us, but my mom did. Dad would talk to us. He'd say, 'Don't whup them, don't, don't...' You know. And my mom, 'But that kid need a beatin.' You know, all like that. I said, 'I'm not gonna do it no more, I'm

not gonna do it no more.’ And sure enough, it was good I did because I actually learned how to drive then, you know. And I’ll never forget one time that my stepmother got sick, and wasn’t nobody there but me. So, good thing you had a car and you could take them to a doctor, something like that. But no we had a good time. And what was so good about it when my cousin lived up on the hill from us, and me and her was just like this. She would tell me things that I didn’t know about, about life, you know. About what we females do when we get a certain age. ‘Cause my mom would say, ‘Oh, you don’t need to know that, you’re too young.’ But I had someone to tell me; I appreciate those kind of things. And it was good.

I could brag all day about how good God been to me. He really has. I’m 66 years old, and I have 6 children. And my first husband died; left me with 5 children. And I still didn’t let it stop me. I went on. The Lord sent me this good husband I have now. Me and him had a daughter; she’s 32 now, she’s not a baby. And I didn’t have no car or nothing to get to church with. But this wasn’t the church I was going to go; this is a new church. We were going up at Green Memorial Church at the time. We’d catch the bus; go up to church. I don’t care how bad it was, I always went to church on the bus. What would I have to lean on if I didn’t have the Lord and the Christian peoples? It was hard, but the Lord sent me brother John Jackson. And he was from a home with 12 children, and 9 brothers. And you know what I do? I make a joke: I tell them I got the best one out of the 9. He’s got two brothers as ministers. They have a church home in Auburn. I’ve been blessed. A lot of people say ‘lucky,’ but you’re lucky when you win something and you’re blessed when the Lord had did something for you. That’s the way I put it. And God has always been there for me.

And I’m jumping all around, but I can’t help it. I can’t help but to thank God for Reverend Coleman—our pastor we have here. He is a sweet young man. I have a son the same age he is. You know, we was wondering what we was gonna do for a minister; we wondered. Done had but one little room in this building here. Now you think about it now. How good God been. And he sent this young man from Louisiana to the mill. It’s Sapphi now; it used to be another name. So before Mother Williams died, she found this young man and asked him would he be

our minister, because her husband was found dead out back of the church, on the ground with a heart attack—Bishop Williams. So now Reverend Coleman decides to take over there, and look what God have did for us since he took over. Fourteen years. You know. And I could brag all day on the Lord because a human didn't do it, the Lord did it. And he's a good man. Reverend Coleman will be there; he's there for us all the time, regardless. I say, 'Thank God he's saved because somebody call on me like that, I don't know can I do it all the time.'

You know. I'm there for people, though. My main thing now is visiting the older peoples that are older than I am. In nursing homes and and convalescent homes, whatever. And most of them would like me to read the Bible to them and tell things about what happened when I growed up. And you know we don't have too many Black folks here, and most of them is white, most of them is white. And I told her, 'God don't handle special colors.' You know. I mean, one day I came in and she said, 'Well, what you gonna do?' I said, 'I'm just gonna read to you.' She said, 'I thought you was white.' And I said, 'No, I'm Black.' And I said, 'Your skin is white.' And I said, 'I love you.' And so she said, 'Well, if you love me, I love you.' One of those women down there. When my children were growing up I always worked. You know what kind of work I've been doing all my life ever since I was 9 years old, after we were working in the field? The white woman's kitchen. I do domestic work, clean house. I got keys to all them house. I goes in and I clean, and I lock the door and I come out. And then I sit with older peoples; I just lost one of my patients. He was 99 years old—Uncle Frank. I should have brought his pictures with me. And what's so good about it, my husband worked for the State of Maine and he retired in '91, and then he started going to my jobs with me. We would stay over night, you know, and things like that. And that's right here in Maine, you know, right. We'd go to Yarmouth, and we'd stay with this little old man. And he was so good to me, so good, I'm telling you. When it came to money if I needed, he was always there for me. You see, his niece and them was overseeing him, but when they went out of town or went out of country, me and my husband was overseeing him, and we took care. I like doing things like that because you realize a man marrying a woman and never having no children, and nothing but his two nieces. And then when he found me, he really was happy. Put it this way: most of the girls that went in there stole from him; because he was

well off, they stole from him. But, see, I didn't 'cause if he had anything I wanted, God give me a mouth to ask him. So, see, I would ask him if I needed something. I said, 'Uncle Frank, I'm fitting to go to the store,' I said. 'I need some money.' He say, 'You know where it's at, in the drawer; get what you need.' Those kind of things. And it made me feel so good for him to trust me, you know; that's the best thing in the world for a person to trust you in their homes. And when I goes to the bank for him, I would write out checks for him, you know. And when they got ready to go away, his niece, she was okay. But she wasn't really nice, her husband was. And they would make me out two or three checks right there. 'You know, if he died, I won't get this part of the money.' Something told me to take it to Uncle Frank and show it to him. I showed it to him. He said, 'What are they trying to prove?' And I say, 'Well, this is what he did.' He took those checks and he ripped them up. He said, 'Here's an open check with my named signed down here.' And he said, 'If I die before they come back,' he said, 'you write in what I owe you.' And I thought that was so wonderful for his age, you know. And sure enough, she got where she didn't want to bother with him no more. She took him from us and put him in a nursing home. He died within three weeks. I know what it was. He wasn't even sick. I know he'd died within three; I tried to get her to let me and my husband just come to stay with him. 'Nah, I better put him in the nursing home.' And I went in there. And he would like for me to get on the floor and lay my head on his lap, and he would pat my head, you know. And he said, 'You're the daughter that I didn't have.' You know. And I said, 'Yeah, I'm here for you, Uncle Frank.' You know.

And something else he did: he adopted a little Black girl. When she was 4 years old she lost her mom; they was on Buxton Island here in Maine; that was his summer home. And he'd adopt her and then he sent her to college, and she come to be a nurse. And his wife had cancer and she waited on him all. And so the wife died, and the girl, she got married. And when that man died, you know how much money that he left this Black girl? Three hundred thousand dollars to his Black daughter; he left that to her. I feel kind of bad because the things she was doing with the money, you know. Drinking and stuff like that. I feel kinda bad.. I really wish that he would have donated it somewhere. You know what I mean, right? Not to me, but to a children's home

or another nursing home or something like that. But he already had it wrote down. I just loved the old man. He was so sweet. And a lot of those books over there, he give them to me. And I put them in the church. He's in Washington, D.C. I think he must have been about 4 foot 11. He was short. And he would sit and tell; I wish I would sit up about all night listening to him. And he had a song he used to sing: 'I'm by myself, but I'm not lonely.' And I used to love to hear him. He had this big old beautiful piano, and I wanted that piano so bad for my church, but she wouldn't give it to me. You know, he said, 'That's up to my niece.' She said, 'Well, I have to keep it.' You know. But it's okay, God been good to us.

That was wonderful. Can you tell me something about your grandparents?

My mom's peoples. Well she had her mom and dad for while, and they both died with cancer. She lost her father first, and I used to call him Pa D. And their last name was Young. Grandpa. And her name was Pankey, Pinkey, something or other. Francis. And my mom come from a family, I think now—I don't wanna say this wrong—I think there was 15 of them, brothers and sisters. So, they're all gone now, but 3 brothers and 1 sister. So, and that's a blessing for us to still have those. My grandmother Pinkey, she lived to get married again to a professor. He was a professor and they had a beautiful white home out there. And there was something I was gonna tell you young ladies about what happened to my great grandfather. You know we just lost him in '65; he was 113. He lived to bury all his children, but two or three. You see what I'm saying? He buried them. And he had a dog in 1965. He'd go fishing all the time. His oldest's daughter's home, he lived in it. And he got and he fell in the river, and the dog pulled him out. Now this was told by a neighbor, not us. You know, we wasn't there because we had _____ Told by a neighbor what this dog did. The dog went and got this neighbor and brought him down in the get park my grandpa, great grandpa. They brought him home, put him in the bed. 'You wanna go to the doctor?' 'No,' he said, 'I'm gonna die right here in my home.' And I think about two weeks he died. And you know, right there in his home. But could you imagine him that age living there by himself? I wish you girls could have seen him; he looked so good for his age. You know, that age? 113? And he was still working, planting food. He didn't really have to do it—something to keep him going, you know? And then he fell in there, and the dog pull him out. I

said, 'That is so wonderful'; you think about that. Family was crazy about my dogs; oh, I loved the dog. I was going to get some water out of the spring and I decided I'd ride the dog down the hill. And a rabbit come across; and the dog started running and throwed me off. I've got a scar on my knee to prove it. I must have been about seven. The dog threw me off. And I was crying, 'I thought you was my friend, I thought you was my friend; you hurt my leg.' And the dog come and she looked at me like this and then she did her head like this, you know, like, 'I'm sorry.' Then you know when I see a rabbit, I want to chase the rabbit.[laughter].

My daddy's people. I never remember my grandfather on my daddy's side. But I was telling you about the grandmother that had the turkey; that was his mother. She had three sons and one daughter, and they're all gone now. My oldest sister is the only one left on my daddy's side, the one I was telling you about that had that lupus. But we're coming a long way. I still do a day's work now with people, you know. And I clean my church, I do the church. It makes me feel good to have a church home to come to. And have Christian people that you can turn to when you're in need and wanna talk to somebody. That's what it's all about. Having somebody that you could talk to. Sometime, sometime it gets so lonely. Me and my husband will sit there and he says, 'Honey, somebody should call us,' you know. 'That's okay, we got God on our side.' You know, like that. I've got a thing that I do every morning when I wake up. I say good morning. 'Good morning, Jesus; thank you for sending your angels down to wake me up.' You know, that's just something I thought doing it myself, because you really don't wake up just by yourself. The Lord and His angels wake you up. And it make you feel so good, you know. And we got this big double bed, and I look over and I see my husband still breathing, and I say, 'Thank you.' Because he had a stroke last year, but he's still doing good. Thank God. He was so good help bring up those, my children, my dead husband's children. He was so good; Mr. Jackson was so good. They call him 'Pop' now, you know. The great grandchildren call him 'Pop Pop,' and the great grandchildren call me 'Nana Mama.' And we have a big family. I have 14 grandchildren and 5 great grandchildren and 5 children left.

My oldest daughter, I lost her 5 years ago. And that's what I got to tell you young ladies what

happened to me after she died. I thought I was gonna die. That's the worse thing in the world putting a child in the ground. I didn't know what to do; I said, 'Lord, what is I going to do?' So one day I went for a walk. And we got a seaside nursing home by the water over there and we got a big beach sitting out there. And I was sitting down. 'Lord, why did you take her?' I'm just rocking back and forth. 'Lord, why did you take her?' And God knows if I had a Bible, I'd put my hand on it. This voice come to me and said, 'My child, she wasn't yours in the beginning; I only loaned her to you.' I thought somebody was talking with me. And I looked around; I didn't see nobody. And I got all shaky like. Then I heard this other voice, 'Look around you, my child.' And you know what was behind me? A nursing home with peoples in there didn't even know their names. And I got up and I went in that nursing home, and after that day I said, 'Lord, thank you; I will never complain no more because I thank you for the 41 years you gave me with her.' If everybody could think that way, you know. Last year, my husband had a stroke in May, my oldest son was in a coma 31 days, but I kept on going. And I had a friend that looked at me. I belongs to a grange out in Westbrook, and we were there at the meeting and she kept looking at me. And I said, 'Why are you looking at me like that?' She said, 'How can you smile and talk when all this trouble, you know, like it is?' And I said, 'That's because I know the Lord.' And she said, 'I know Him, too.' 'And, but see, I serves Him. And when you serve Him, you got the best friend in the world when you got Him to talk to.' A many a day I have got in my car and just parked and read my Bible and thank Him for the thing he did. Because He really didn't have to; He could have took all my kids, you know what I mean? But He did exactly what we asked Him to do. That night that she died she was in a coma with her eyes open. Me and my husband went into this hospital room, got on our knees, and said, 'Lord if you ain't gonna make her whole again—get her up and make her whole again—take her home.' At 9:30, He took her home because he knowed that she couldn't live like that. Know what I mean? And God was good to me because the next morning I would have had to pull the pin on her; they had in these contraptions. I would have had to pull the pin because she didn't have a living will, you know what I mean? And God was good to me. I didn't have to pull the pin and always saying, 'I wonder did I do the right thing?' So the Lord brought her home. It's hard, it's hard, but ain't nothing too hard for the Lord when you call on Him. You know. He'll be there for you. I have come a long way, but I

have had a beautiful life. I thank God for Jesus. I have nothing to complain about because won't do me no good anyway. What I did when my husband and son was in the hospital, I got my pillow and come over here to Williams Temple and got on a pew and laid down. And I was pretty upset and I already done give it to the Lord why should I keep plaguing Him about the same thing? And I said, 'Lord, it's your will, it's your will be done and thank you for what You already did.' And I got up and I walked out the church. And I said, 'Why was I keep plaguing Him?' But you know how, you're only human. But I could talk about Him all day--Jesus; that's who I could talk about all day. But if you girls want to get what else, something else, I'd be glad to.

What is your educational background?

Well, I got to the 8th grade and, believe it or not, I went back to school to Portland High night school. That's what I was waiting on you all to ask me. [laughter] They will give you a diploma, but it won't be like yours. They will teach you. My problem was learning me how to read better so when my children ask me a question I would know how to answer. So, now that was a blessing, you know. They didn't want to believe that I had that many children. They would look at me and say, 'You're just a student, aren't you?' 'No,' I said, 'a mother.' And my baby was born. But my teacher, he couldn't believe it. But he kept telling me, 'I'm so proud of you, I'm so proud of you.' And I wondered did he really mean that? You know. But I know I was proud of myself to do this. That's one thing you get: an education; nobody can take it from you. And then you go up in a store or something, you don't have to act like you're embarrassed about you don't know these things. You don't know how to count. You can't read so you gotta put a X down there and those kind of things. My father had to do that, but guess who taught him how to write his name? I did. I taught my daddy how to write his name, how to read and write. And I was only in the 8th grade. But see I got married so young. You're looking at 15 years old--married. And had my oldest son. Of course he's gonna be 50 in September. But I still not gonna complain because with the six children I got and the one that I lost, you know, the Lord will give me what he intend to give me. And I loved going back to school because it was like I had missed something. I got married so young. It was two things, I got married so young and

then learning how to read and write. And that was the best thing beside my husband and children ever happen to me in my life is when I went back to school and learned those things. And I did it on my own. And my husband was working at night and my children would keep the baby for me when they were going to school in the daytime. And it was just a wonderful thing.

How old were you when you got married?

Fifteen at first. And my husband, he was older than I was because he was like 13 years older than I was. My first husband. He was in the Korean War. And when he came home, he died on the way to the store. He had a stroke. I still didn't let that stop me. I kept on, kept on. Most of the people I work for are Jewish people, but they're very good to me. [side B]

So, you said you liked school.

Oh, yes. I think if I had to now, I would go back. Even at this age. The oldest student in my room was 69 at the time, when I was 35. So we would talk about things, you know, like when we were girls. Now one reason that I didn't get a chance to finish school is really because my mom and daddy divorced, and then I got married early, you know. So. But that shouldn't stop a person, especially if they got the material in there for you to go get it. You know, I look at people and they're, 'Oh I can't go back.' Why not? Because it's in there for us and it's free; the schooling was free that I went to, you know. I didn't have to pay for it. And it was so much fun, us getting together like that. I think it was 15 of us, and the oldest one was 69. What they did, they would do those tests to you by getting up reading and all. And they would tease me about my accent. And then the teacher would tell them that he understood my accent better than he did they, because they wasn't talking like I was. You know. And I said, 'I talk so fast,' you know, 'but we from the South.' And he said, 'But that's okay, Mrs. Jackson, we can understand what you saying perfectly.' Every time I go by there and look at Portland High, I say, 'Thank you for that school.' It was so much fun. And then I would come back to the house and I'd look at my pictures and I'd say, 'Well, gee, I guess I did look pretty.' I should have brought some of the pictures. I got a picture with me and all my children together. And they would say, 'Which one is you?' And I'd say, 'The old one.' 'You all look alike.' I said, 'Well, God's been very good to

me.' He really has. It hasn't been like happy, happy all the time after I had the kids because I went through some problems with my grandson. You know, worry about him. And they sent him away to Maine Youth Center, which is a blessing to get him off the street. But I still can count my blessing because somebody could have killed him. He did get shot at by a white crossing guard because he was walking down the street with a white girl.

What kind of jobs did you have in your life?

Well, like I told you, working on a farm. And ever since then I've been in white folks' houses; that's the only kind of work I did. Cleaning. And everybody that I cleaned for wanted me to come back because I'm a very good cleaner. And when I was eight years old—eight or nine—my grandmother, my daddy's mom, took me with her and learned me how. Stood me on a stool, learned me how to make biscuits in the white folks' kitchen. And it's a blessing because like my pastor would tell me: A job is a job regardless what it is. So I learned how to do cleaning, and I'm a tell you an incident happened to me. Thank God for Jesus. My mom went to visit one of my cousins down the road from us and I went with her. And I had a big, long red wagon, and the wheel come off, and I left it parked side of the street. And mom went in there and talked to cousin and asked him to come out. And I seen the wire plier laying on the step and I said, 'Oh that's what I need to fix my red wagon.' My mom seen me do it, but she was testing me. She said, 'Baybay, where did you get those?' 'Oh,' I said, 'Cousin Nancy's porch.' She said, 'Did you ask for them?' I said, 'No, I'm gonna take them back.' She said, 'If you take something without asking for it, that's stealing.' We had a peach tree out there; she grabbed her a switch out of it, whipped me on my legs all the way over the hill, and made me go tell Cousin Nancy that I had stole. That was one of the worst days of my life. 'Cousin Nancy, I'm sorry I stole your wire plier, but I brought them back.' And cousin Nancy said, 'Oh no, you didn't steal them, honey.' My mother said, 'No, she did; she didn't ask for them.' And you know I'm glad because I might have grown up to be taking things if my mother hadn't correct me that day. And been working ever since I was 9 years old in and out of white folks' kitchens, and I thank God for it because everybody I worked for always like me. And most time you'd keep the children while they go out of town, you know. And that came in handy; that's good money, you know. It

helped send my children to school and feed them.

I remember when we was in Sagamore, we lived in a bump up–second floor. And this white lady lived underneath me; she had 9 children. But I had a house full of food. And she come upstairs and she was crying. I says, ‘What’s the matter, Barbara?’ She said, ‘My children are hungry; my husband lost his job.’ I said, ‘Gee, we got food.’ She said, ‘When you get through cooking your potato, could you save me the water?’ I said, ‘What you gonna do with it?’ She said, ‘I’m gonna make potato soup.’ I said, ‘No, honey, you don’t need to do that,’ I said. ‘I got food.’ I had so much stuff; I had canned goods stacked all in the front. So what I did, I feed them peoples. And that must have been that November, and that December I had a knock come on my door. And it was her and her husband standing there. And they just started hugging me. And I said, ‘What?’ They said, ‘Guess what happened? His job gave him some back pay and he has \$400 for Christmas for you guys.’ Could you imagine back in the ‘60s, \$400 extra for Christmas? And see what I did: I did a good deed and then they did a good deed. And that was the best Christmas me and my children have had. We’ve always had a good Christmas, but, I mean, we had a big tree, the children had things. One of my sons, I got him a bicycle–something he never had. A black- and-white TV for the bedroom. And their friends would come to my house and they would pray for it to snow so they get a chance to stay at my house. If it snow, I take them in, you know, and let them stay there. I enjoyed it, the children enjoyed it, and they would say, ‘Oh I love living at your mom’s house because she cooks so good and she’s so good to us.’ You know, stuff like that. That was not far from here. In the building there, Sagamore Village, yeah, that’s where we lived at then.

The Lord blessed us in the end to buy us a home in South Portland, me and my husband. In our last days we on a nice, nice street; we’re the sixth family there on a dead end street. Because when you’re in an apartment, you know it ain’t no quietness. You’ve got all the neighbors to compete with you, living underneath or up top, if it’s a duplex; kicking on the walls. It’s not nothing to be ashamed of, though; that’s home. But it’s just you get a certain age and you been worked all your life. But I’m not gonna complain about that, either. I said, I’m glad I’m able to

work because with his retirement, if I wasn't getting no days, I don't know. My daughter, she's pretty good. But first what I thank God for is my health and strength because if I didn't have that, I couldn't work. Do you know what I mean? And I said, 'Well, I'll just stay on, stay to work.' My son said, 'Mom, you still working?' 'Yup, got more days than I need; anybody else need me I'll go work for them.' 'No mamma.' I said, 'If you pay me I will; if you get the money I'm making, I'll stop working.' 'Well, I don't know about that.' I says, 'Well, leave me alone; let me work.' That's what I like about it; I like the independence. That's a good thing, too, to be independent. You know. You don't have to always depend on somebody all the time.

[How long have you lived in Maine?]

What is it, 40? 39..39 years. 39 years.

When and why did your family come to Maine?

Well, I had a sister that come here. Her husband come here. What happened, her brother-in-law came here first as a freedom rider, her brother-in-law did. And then her husband came, and then he sent back and got her and her children. And then wrote me a letter and told me about Maine was a good place. And then my husband come here; then he sent and got us. I rid the bus. I was living in Jackson, Mississippi. I rid the bus, me and my five children. And I fell in love with Maine because peoples here cared about peoples, you know. I never have been just a poor person, like didn't have no food or nothing much. The Lord always has fixing for us to have food on the table and clothes to wear, and stuff like that. I get to thinking about my children. My sons' pictures that when they all started school, they all had on suits and bow ties, neck ties, you know. First day of school, all dressed up and stuff like that. And one of my sons was a altar boy at Green Memorial's church; you know, like lighting the candles and putting them out. My oldest son, he taught Sunday School; he was sixteen. And they sung in the choir—had beautiful voices. And they all went to church with me every Sunday. Like I told how one of them complained, 'Why do we have to go to church every Sunday?' 'Because God don't go on vacation.' And the rest of them know they have to go. And I say, 'In my house on a Sunday

you're gonna go to church.' Okay, well I had my oldest and my youngest living with me, right? My youngest is still living with me. I said, 'You're in my house on a Sunday, you're going to church.' Okay. My oldest son would leave on a Friday and come back on a Monday. [laughter] He said, 'You said if I was in your house on a Sunday.' Okay. But other than that, I'm always there for them to fall back on if they need me, you know. My sister would say, 'Oh, I wouldn't do that.' I said, 'Well, I'm sorry; God give them to me, and if they need me I wanna be there for them.' You know. And I'm not a type of mother that always asks my children to help me. I'm independent, you know. I always have been like that, independent. And thank God for it.

Me and my husband have so good a time together. We have been married 34 years, me and him, and we've never had a fight. And he said that mens shouldn't ever be angry with the woman because the woman the one that brought them into the world. And I think that was so nice, you know, for him to say that because if you ever look back on it. But I know a lot of womens, I don't know how some mens can live with them because they're very hateful. But the way I look at it, a man got a feeling like a woman. A lot of women take advantage of men because they're women, but I don't think that's fair, you know. You know, like I told you that me and him never had no fight. Well, we always together but sometime it feel like it closing in. Like, give me a little room. And I say 'Baby, you wanna go for a ride?' He's like, 'Oh no, you can go on for a ride; I'll be alright.' So see, I'm getting out of his hair to let him breathe. So that's what I do, you know. And then sometimes I would take him. I do five miles a day, come to think of it; I do five miles a day walking. And even when it's cold in the winter time, I go to the mall because they open up at 7. And you go in there where they eat at and walk. I have the thing on my arm telling me how many miles I made. That might be because I feel so good. I walk and I don't eat the wrong kind of food, either. We don't eat out. You know why? Because I know what's going in it when I cook it at home. Even if we're going to our meeting at night, I take my husband's food with him. Because I know what's in it. Because he had the stroke, he can't have salt.

Before you came here, you lived in Mississippi?

Yeah.

What is the differences between Maine and Mississippi?

Well, nothing with me. I was working doing the same thing. Only, you make more money here, until you've been a long time. But I couldn't say because of the white folks I was working for, because one white woman went and helped me come. She give me a trunk and she give me money and stuff to help come here. And she said because in another two or three years there would be a lot of fighting going on there. And which it was, after we left. You know, with the black and the white. But I think I could live just about anywhere, though. I really do. 'Cause I get along with peoples and I look at it this way: we're all in this thing together regardless what color our skin is. That's the way I look at it. I would never pass a white person on the street and down on the ground unless I stop and check and see what's wrong with him or she, you know? That's the way I am because we're all God's children. There's so many people think they're better than another on account of the color of their skin, but I feel sorry for them. Because look at my babies, my grand babies. All their mothers are white; most of them. And my great grandchildren the same way. I don't love them no less than I do the all Black ones. It just don't make no sense. And, again, if people look at it this way. If the Lord wasn't intend for that child to be here, he wouldn't be here. That's the way I look at it. We might not approve of not being married when you get the babies, but who is we to say? That's the only thing that I will really say. You should get married, but other than that, there ain't nothing I can do about it but be there for them when they need me. You know what else I love? I love for the family to get together, and I cook big dinners. They all come to my house, you know. We get together and we have big dinners. All the grandchildren.

Then I got these real tall grandsons. One is in Elmira College now. You all might have knowed him, I'll give his name: Alvin. Alvin Wisebud Drake. I know you all knowed him because he played ball; he went to Cheverus for a while. He played ball for Portland High and he win all the games and he got all these beautiful trophies. Well, he's like 6' 6". When he come into my house, he picks me up and says, 'Touch the ceiling, Grandma,' because I'm the shortest person in

my family. All the rest of them are very tall. Even my children, I'm shorter than their mother. When it comes to my grandchildren and my children I'm about the shortest one. And they ask me what happened to me and I tell them, 'Somebody gotta shine their shoes for them.' We is the type of people that like different kinds of food that you guys might not even know about. Sweet potato pie? Okay, well my grandson loves it. And then I have one like the chocolate cake and one like the lemon cake. And this lady looked at me and she says, 'You mean you cook what your grandsons want?' I say, 'Everything they want, I cook it for them.' And one like a peach cobbler, I make it. And they like hush puppies and fried fish; I make it. That's what it's all about, you enjoying your family. You don't just, 'Oh, no, I ain't gonna be cooking this for you today, boy.' Soon as they come home from college or whatever, I'm right there for them. I'm so proud of them, you know, I'm so proud of them. Because they didn't have to do that; they could have been out there in the street fighting and acting stupid. But they're going the right way. Making something out of themselves; making me proud. You know. They're not living for me, but I've been there for them. And they're making me feel so good; as soon as I see them I just start saying, 'Those are my grandchildren, my grandsons.' And well one lady will say, 'Well I don't allow mine in my house.' And I say, 'Why?' 'Oh, well, they destroy.' I say, 'Well, I thank God for Jesus, mine ain't like that.' Mine are beautiful. I'm not saying they're perfect. I had 26 peoples at my house for dinner. And things like that. Family together, you know. And you laugh and talk, and you get through eating and you play these games with them and tell about long time ago. And one of them will say, 'Grandma, did you come back from the olden time?' I say, 'What do you call olden time?' And then I would say, 'Well, I wasn't in slavery,' I said, 'but my ancestors were.'

I had one of my great grandsons to ask me one day, 'Nana Mama, where are your wrinkles?' I say, 'What do you mean?' See, his white grandmother had wrinkles. And you gotta be on the alert with those little kids; and he was only two and a half. And I said, 'Well, I put it this way. You know a long time ago, the Lord knowed our ancestors was going to be slaves and He give us an extra layer of skin. And that's the reason why our skin don't get wrinkled quick as the white women's do.' And he sat there like this; he said, 'That's so pitiful.' And then he turned

around and said, 'No, but that's beautiful what the Lord did for your skin.' [laughter] So, see, those things count. When they come to you and ask you these questions, and you gotta be ready to answer. You can't just say, "Well, I think, I think it's this way." Because my grandchildren ask all kind of questions. And you gotta be ready for them, especially the boys. I got more boys. I got more boys than I do girls. But I enjoy it. But that was so funny how he asked me where was my wrinkles. I said, 'Where my wrinkles?' But do you know what it is? It is the fact that Black people do have an extra layer of skin. That's the reason why. Now when I start to get wrinkles, it will most will be in here; you know, right on my neck. I look at most of my white friends. I got a lot of white friends; I mean, they're good friends to me. And they'll tell me, 'Rose Jackson, I hate you.' I said 'Why?' 'You ain't got no wrinkles.' 'Oh, yes I do.' They said, 'Well, I'm talking about your face.' I says, 'Well, I'm getting there.' 'Oh, no, it isn't.' And I have been where I couldn't sleep at night and I think it's because I had stopped walking after I eat. See, that's what I should do. And so I got so dark around my eyes, I said, 'I wonder what's happening?' And my husband said, 'Well, baby, it's probably because you..you know,'— getting up during, through the night, waiting on him and stuff like that.

What was your experience raising your kids?

What, honey?

What was your experiences raising your children?

With me, you couldn't use them alike. You always had to use each individual child differently. My oldest son was my friend; he was always there for mama. My oldest daughter: I loved her, but she was a headache. You know, the one that's dead. She was as sweet as she could be, but she was always finding something to do. She would always knock one of her brothers out [laughter] with something. But the boys got along good together; they got along good together, the boys did. But you imagine me having four sons and a daughter that many years before I had another baby girl? Ah, that was so wonderful when they told the doctor I was having another girl. We was a close family.

What differences do you think there are between then and now?

Then and now. I'm wishing that the kids would come see me more. I feel sorry for myself. You know, like, 'Why don't they come over more?' You know, stuff like that. But I know they came over to my house. But I wish it was like it used to be, I really do; I wish it was like it used to be.

In what ways were you involved in your children's lives to help them to succeed in life?

I never did drink. You know, and never did do things that I didn't want them to do. You know, I see a lot of parents what they go and do these things and then they'll beat the kid because they did it. My things was to talk to the child more. Long years ago all they believed in getting a switch or something to whup them. But I would talk to them more because beatings is not the answer. Yeah, sometimes we had to spank them, sure, but just to beat them about everything. No, no, I don't think so. 'Cause you know, long years ago we had children that wet the bed. And I seen a lot of people whup their children, but I wouldn't because they couldn't help that. I remember I had three bedwetters at once; and you know they gotta go to school, so what you gonna do? You're not gonna let them go to school smelling. So, know what I did? I would wait until five o'clock the next morning and wake them up and bathes them. You know? Yeah, because if they go to school without being bathed, you know what they're going to smell like, don't you? So this one little girl, they picked at her at school all the time. Cried. And my son come home, say, 'I feel so sorry for Judy, Mama.' I say, 'What happened?' And he told me. And I said, 'Get her telephone number, and I'll call her mom.' And I call her mother and she says, 'What do you do?' I says, 'Well, I don't bathes them at night, I wait til the morning to bathes them, after they done slept and wet the bed.' And she says, 'How do you do that?' I says, 'Well.' She says, 'I gotta wash my daughter's hair.' 'That's what I want to do for your daughter; put a night cap on her head. It's because she's got that long hair and you can't wash it every morning. Put a night cap on her head and wake her up in the morning an hour early and bathe her.' And, oh, that woman was so happy. And that's the way I did my boys because I wasn't gonna have nobody saying that they were smelling. And then I would take all the sheets off the bed and wash them, and got a line in the kitchen in the winter time and hang them up on the line. And have that bed back first when they come home. That's the way I did. That's why I look at

so many people. How they would let the children go dirty and they wouldn't clean the house. Why? The children is in school. You do your house and then go on to your job. And I'd be back in time they got home from school. Done made cookies for them. And I went and did two houses, and I'd be right back at that house, made cookies for my babies when they get home, and be right there for them. And, see, I remember the state worker telling me they gonna give me a state check. I said, 'No way.' I say, 'I ain't living on no state.'

So my first husband was in the service. I went to the government, started getting checks by them, and kept my jobs. Because I didn't want nobody looking down their nose at me; I'm a very independent person. And my children come to me and they wanna work. And the guy that lived at Portland Public Housing helped all my children start working at age 12 and 13. Doing the grounds. One of them was cleaning up around the projects, the other was working at the armory in South Portland. Those kind of things. You raise them to be independent, not always, 'Mom, can I have this? Mom, can I have that?' And my oldest daughter, she helps sing to children at the day care schools. And I have a son now work for the City of Portland. And my youngest son, he work for an alcoholic place, for all these peoples in there that they going through alcohol dealing. He's been in the service; he was in Biloxi, Mississippi, when he was in the Air Force. He drank that water and it give him--what would they give him, what did this stuff do to him?--hepatitis. And they had to take his spleen out; but he looks good now, though, he looks very good. I thank God for that.

We have had some close calls, you know, but other than that. I can thank God. Never did have a car until I married the second husband; always catching buses. Only had just that one child that complained because we was a happy family. And you know one thing about what happened? I was a tomboy mother; there were so many sons. We would play ball and I would throw the ball just as hard as they will, bat the ball. And when you're living in a place like Sagamore, you got this whole big field out there to play in, you got room for everybody. And these children were so jealous of us, and we used to, 'Come on over and play with us,' you know. And uh, 'But we want our daddy and mama to come.' I say, 'Well, go and get them.' He said, 'No, they're sick.'

So I said, 'Well, don't bother them with it; come on and play with us.' Yeah, I had to be a tomboy with all those boys-rough. I remember one day I was wrestling with my sons, and this guy come driving by in a car. He say, 'Hey, you're kinda rough with them, ain't you?' I says, 'Well sir, I'm their mama.' 'You what?' [laughter] I said, 'I was just learning them how to take care of themselves if they ever had to. Not bullying, but if you ever had to take care of yourself, be able to take care of yourself.' So he said, 'Oh, pardon me, I didn't know. I thought you....' See, every time one tried to wrestle me down, I get the best of them and put my foot on them, you know. And the guy thought I was being mean to somebody else's children.[laughter] They were so glad for me to be able to teach them, by them being males, you know. And just like I told you that number two was the only that kinda hard headed; he always complained about something. The working for the city now. He was always, 'Well, Mama, I don't like this kinda food and I don't like this kinda food.' I says, 'When you get a job and start working, you'll get the kind of food you want to eat, son. Other than that you gotta eat what we eat.' 'I want biscuit, I don't want no cornbread.' I says, 'Well I'm sorry, I love cornbread.'

What are some of the most important holidays that you celebrate?

Most of the holidays what we celebrate were Thanksgiving and Christmas, because you be able to give gifts and you get together. And Easter is another time; Easter was, oh, a really good time, because I remember one Sunday we all looked dressed up coming home from church and it snowed. On Easter Sunday. [laughter] But that was okay. We were used to riding buses; that's the transportation that we had to getting back for the church. The church people wanted to know could they get a cab for us or something. I said, 'No, we'll ride the bus.'

You told me you did. How often?

We haven't had none nigh in about six years because my aunt, she died. My dad's wife's sister. And we had it at my sister's house in Scarborough because it was so many of us. This is not just my individual family, this is my all around family. My sisters and their children and their grand children and me and mine. And I should have been brought those pictures. It was beautiful; and

they were made in color. And it was so beautiful, us all to get together like that; even my dead daughter was living at the time and she was in the picture. And that was so beautiful.

[tape 2]

She came. She stayed with me a while, she stayed with my sister a while, and then she'd go over to my other sister's. I wish you all could see her picture because she's in a wheelchair, and she was in her eighties, and she didn't have no wrinkles. Good looking woman. And her oldest daughter died before she did. Well, I was most close to my dad's people, though, my dad's people. Definitely more than my mom's people. You know, a lot of time you got stuck up people that don't want to bother with you, but my dad's people was always there if you want to talk to them or something. And I'll never forget the things that I used to love that my father would do to me. And he would pat me on the head and say, 'Your daddy's little worker, right?' I was 'yeah.' And I'd say, 'Daddy,' I say, 'don't ever leave me.' He said, 'You can't say that because whenever God get ready for me, I gonna have to go.' And he say, 'And vice versa; it could you be go first, you know.' And it took me so long to realize what he was saying about 'when the Lord get ready for me to go,' you know. So. But he was always there, regardless to what it was he would, he would back me up.

I'll never forget he would send us to school, but he would go down and he'd tell the teacher, 'No licking my children because if they need it, I'll give it to them myself.' He would always tell them that. And one day one man forgot and licked my sister, and he got in trouble, this guy did, with my father. He said, 'I told you all no licking my children; if they need licking, I'll do it.' I look back at that a lot. I think about how the children, some of the children is nowadays. They have some many peoples telling them what to do, and then when they grow up they go so back and so wrong because they straddle the fence. I done told him something to do, and this person over here done told him something to do, and this one over here don't care. But me, I was always there for them. I was always took time when one of mine come in and ask me for a, ask me a question. They would say, 'Mom, why is such and such a thing so many, so different like this?' I explain to them in my way how I felt about it. And then they would say something else.

I says, 'Well, that's their problem.' 'Well, Mom, I like them and I wish that they was happy like I am.' I says, 'Well, what you do is start talking to your friend, and maybe he'll talk through to his parents and get them to start treating him good.' I had so many children come to my house explain to me how their parents treated them. But mine didn't have no complaint because I was always there for them. And regardless to what it was, unless if it was something that really.. If it was something that I didn't approve of, but we'll sit down and talk about it, deeply talk about it. And I had one son that, he was very hard to get along with when it come to eating; everything had to be some much different. That's that number two son that work for the city. And the way I did it, on the weekend we would have our country breakfast, you know. 'Cause you're going to school, you ain't even got time to sit up there and cook all this food. You get your bowl of cereal, your oatmeal, or grits, or whatever, and go on to school. But on the weekend, I would have my country breakfast. Country breakfast would be sausage, bacon, eggs, biscuits—homemade biscuits. And, but this number two wanted it every morning. So I had to explain to him, 'You on your way to school and I'm on my way to work. So you..' I be asking, 'What would you do if you didn't have that bowl of cereal to eat?' I said, 'You'd be hungry; so eat it and get out of here. And let's you go your way and I go mine, okay?' Okay, they all go.

And my baby boy. I lived right by a school. And when he growed up old enough to go to school I walked him to school and he's, 'Mom, I'm old enough to go on my own.' So we lived by some woods. So what I would do, I would let him go down this trail and I'd tell him, 'Now don't ever go through the woods.' And I would slip through the woods so he wouldn't see me. I would hide over in the woods behind a tree and watch him until he go in the door. And then he got big enough to go the neighborhood store to get a loaf of bread or whatever, and I would go round the trail, up the other way, and watch him. So then one day he caught me. He's, 'Mama, please, when is I gonna get old enough for you to let me go?' Then finally I let him start going. He talked about that the other night. 'Mom, why were you like that?' ' Well that's why I was too overprotective; cause you were my baby.' When he would get out of school at lunchtime, me and him would go to Grant's department stores. Well, we would go up there to the lunch counter and have lunch. Oh, that was a good time. Me and my boy had lunch. And lunch then, you

could get it for fifteen or twenty cent. You know, lunch counter, got a sandwich, whatever. And then, before he got old enough to go school, he would go with me to work to these people's houses. I would put him on my back, run up the street and catch the bus. Her youngest would be home. A little boy. Most the time. When they would get ready to go to sleep, she would put both them kids in the same room together and they would sleep. And that's the reason I said I did the best thing in my life to bring my children out of Mississippi to be raised up here in Maine. So God has been very good to me when it come to something like that.

You know, it ain't always cake and cream. It was hard days, but I didn't ever let the kids know it. They didn't ask for me to have them. You know what I mean? The Lord give them to me. So, but I let them know, 'Don't come to me and ask me for fifty dollars,' because they know we ain't in that shape to get no fifty dollars. This is the way I told mine. 'If you need some clothes, we're gonna, we're gonna go buy clothes for school. And then if you get where you need some socks or something, I can pick that up for you.' I says, 'But other than that, don't ever come to me and ask me for a hundred dollar suit, because we can't afford it.' So what we did. We stayed in the spending limit, and none of them went, none of them went lacking. All of them are dressed. Daughters' hair all straightened long and—that's when they straightened with the hot comb. Straightened. The boys have a cut.

And thank God for Jesus, I learned how to cut hair. I'm the barber in my family, and I cut hair; don't even have to pay nobody to do it. And I do my own hair, which I just put a relaxer in and pull up on my head. Because why give it to somebody else? Do it yourself. That's right. And I'm, I'm funny about somebody get in my head. I'm tender headed. Have you heard of a tender-headed person? When my grandmother used to starting coming to comb my hair, and I started crying it hurt so bad. She start combing and it hurt so bad. Because it was so thick. See my real hair will hang way down there on me, and it was thick; oh, it was so thick, my hair was. And as soon as they try to comb it, I'd be straight hollering, crying. Why, I'll never forget one time a man come by my grandmother's house and told her to straighten my hair. She said what you mean? He said with a hot comb. So he sold her this hot comb, and they would start

straightening my hair. And I grew out it. I still got a hot comb at my home, and hot curlers. What I do now—it's a modern world—I go to Sally's and pick up a permanent, put them in my hair. But it's really simple, very simple. Because I can't put the real strength in there. I have to use the light kind. Thank God because with thick hair....

Okay. What community or religious groups have you participated in during your life so far?

Well, I, first time when I was old enough to know what Christian and whatever, baptized on the [Baptist] church. And then, as I went along I went into the Methodist church because we can't say we have a Black church here, because we all race of peoples in it. But then I could say it.. And I went from that to Methodist church and now I'm in Church of God in Christ, a Holy Ghost church. But God is where you make Him be. You know, it don't have to say, 'Oh, that church; God's in that church.' No it's not that kind of thing. God is where you make it be. And basic, it's believing in Him. I see so many different religions, but only one God. That's the way I was brought up; only one God. You know, so we all serve Him.

'll never forget my number three son asking me what color God was; I'll never forget it. 'Mom, what color is God?' I said, 'Baby, what color do you want Him to be?' He says, 'I think I want Him the color of me.' I says, 'Okay, draw Him that color then.' And he drew a Black Jesus and a minister and his wife gave him three hundred dollars for it. He win a scholarship to go to Tennessee State, and he was in Portland High School. Guess what he did? Got married. Only way he got married is to finish high school. 'You get married to her, but you gonna finish high school.' 'Okay, Mama, I will.' Sure enough, he did; so now they got four children. But get that education first; nobody can take it from you. Oh, I just feel so sorry for people out there don't know how to write their name, people be demanding money, stuff like that. But that's one thing nobody can take from you. That's the reason I'm so proud of my grandson what's up in college in New York. Yhe children younger than he is, he always preaching to them about get your education. And this poor child, he Jewish and Black. So [laughter] he's beautiful, though. I love my children.

What were some of the contributions that you made in your community?

What now?

Contributions.

Now what is that?

Like, what do you help....?

In the community that I'm in now, nothing. Before I moved, I used to work with two police officers when I lived in the project. And I would run the community center for the low-income families. And every Thursday we would set up a movie, for the children to see movies. And a lot of them would want to see westerns and stuff like that. But most what I had the police officers bring them out is pictures about dope, stealing, and teaching them what to stay away from. And they were, 'I want this, I want that.' I said, 'And then if you be good, we'll have western movies coming in.' But I enjoyed that. And then I sent them on trips, away to camp, sent them to camp. And the city was paying me, you know, to do this, but I enjoyed working with the children. We would go to Bradbury State Park on picnics. They would ride in the bus and I'd be driving in my car behind them. We'd go up and we'd have a good time. I remember some of these children now from Front Street. They were very low income families, and they knowed when I went on picnics, the city would give me money to buy the stuff. So the children were always coming. 'Oh I love going with you, Mrs. Jackson, because we get a chance to eat hot dogs and all that kind of thing.' And I felt kinda bad because hot dogs is a simple kind of food, you know. And every time I get ready to go, my bus would be packed with the kids to go with us, you know. And you know, I had problems with some of the girls, you know, like undressing, getting in the water without their clothes on. But other than that, I gave them a good talk and they would mind me, you know. Never was no fighting going on on the bus. And we only had a misunderstanding a couple of times about children spitting on the earth or something, you know. Just childish things. You know what was so good about it, though? When they let them go to Peaks Island. You got to get on the boat to go over. Oh, they had a ball over there.

And I really did enjoy working with them. Joe Alberta and Mack were the two police officers that I worked with. And they learnt me how to survive a person, when a person fall on the floor. Lot of people would go and pull them by the arm; you don't do that. If this person—if you by yourself and you can't...Just go down like this. You sit him up, then when you lean him against your legs, and then put your arms under here and you put him up—even if you had to fall back on the bed and let him fall on you. See. Those things they learnt me how to do. And it come in handy when I started working for those old people, because this little old man he was always falling on the floor. And he weighed about 110 pounds and he would brag on me so much. He said, 'Oh, I don't know what I'd do if I didn't have you to pick me up' and this like this. And then they put these contraptions on his tub that he could bathe his own self; and that was so good, he was so precious. I'm so glad I took that kind of job, helping those older peoples. If I live to get older, see, I'll know about how to. How can peoples take—be mean to children, old peoples? You hear about it going on. That's so sad.

Can you tell me about any particular challenges that you or your family faced and how did you face and overcome these challenges?

Face what now? What is this?

Can you tell me about any particular challenges that you or your family faced?

Oh, you mean like with other peoples, or?...

When you came here.

Oh, I didn't have any. No, I didn't have any because everybody seemed to be good to us, you know. I guess I'm one of the blessed ones, because I'm very friendly myself. But I'm the type of person, I don't take no junk—just let people walk on me. But I let them know then and there, 'You want to be treated sweet, you treat me sweet.' That's the way I did it, right off. And I would tell my children, 'Don't be embarrassed because we live in the projects; we have to pay rent, too. As long as you have a roof over your head and a bed to lay in and food to eat, go to school and get your education regardless to how poor you is.' But see, I was one of the blessed one. My children never did go hungry; they never did ask me for something that I wasn't able to give them, unless it was the

fifty dollar suit [laughter] that you couldn't afford. But I, I really was blessed, you know. For a while I was single, with just me and the children; and then I met Mr. Jackson. But, but I never did had a challenge about...

That's the only thing I can think about is this lady that she went and thought because we was Black that she was better than we was. Right now, she's the pitiful sight I ever seen in my life. I visit her, I visit her. Her husband's dead, and her children don't come see her. So I go visit her. And the reason I say, 'You better be careful how you point your finger,' because you don't know who gonna have to put a spoonful of rice or something in your mouth one day. So, I raised my children up to say you ain't no better than nobody else.

In your community who do you see as a leader?

In my community?

Yes.

There ain't nobody in my community a leader but the Lord. Now where we live at everybody own their own home, mind their own business. Come out the house, 'How you doing, Mrs. Jackson?' 'I'm fine, how you doing today?' Like that. But just to be a leader, we don't have nothing like that.

And is there anyone who sees you as a leader?

I have had peoples telling me that, like the nursing homes and peoples that I would meet and say, 'My god, you go places.' They always bragging on me about I know so many peoples and... Now I got one friend, she's 83. She only have two daughters, and they don't even want to live here. Ain't a day pass, I don't check on her. She praise me. 'Ain't nobody in the world no better than sister Rose Jackson. That woman, she always there for me.' You know, like that. But I don't do it for her to brag on me, I do it because I love her. She's a white woman. But I love her and she's so sweet, she's so ladylike. She come to church sometime. And I have never seen her in a pair of slacks, she always wear a dress. And when she lost her husband a few years ago, I was right there with her. And first thing I do, 'Anybody shoveled your snow yet?' That's the kind of person I am, you know,

right.

And I have people to call for donations or something if the, for like the soup kitchen and stuff like that, you know. But our church got a soup kitchen. But over there where I live at, they asked me about you know, can I help. I help work in it sometime, you know. But it's not the one over there, this is the senior citizen thing that we go to and I help out. I like doing things like that, you know, getting together. We like playing bingo and stuff like that. But the community around there and the peoples, they're very nice peoples, and you know they mind their business. But they want to know how everybody's doing. 'How you all doing this morning?' You know, stuff like that. I like that, I really do. A woman have three children on that street and one is 16, the other one is 12, and one is 5. And Zachary is my baby; he blonde and got some of the bluest eyes. When the Med Care come get my oldest son, when he was—his sugar had got to 600. And he, the Med Care had come down and get him. This little old boy got on his bicycle and come to my house. 'Mrs. Jack-on,'—he couldn't say Jackson—'anything I could do?' And I thought that was so cute, you know, for this little 6-year-old boy to come down and ask me. When he seen this med care come to my house, anything he could do. And his mother and them all standing back with their arm folded, looking, but the baby come ask me. And I says, 'Lord, out of the mouth of babes.' And right now I see Zachary. 'Hi Zachary, how you doing?' 'How you doing Mrs. Jack-on; hi Mrs. Jack-on.' [laughter] I think it's so cute, you know. And then the older people standing there wasn't saying, 'Can I help you?' But the baby was there.

How do you see yourself as a leader?

Well, I got a big heart. I must, I must could be a leader because I have a lot of peoples coming to me, you know, coming to me asking me different things. Would I do this for them or could I do this? Could I pray with them or could I talk to them? And especially pray, because a lot of people don't know how to pray. And as soon as they come asking me, 'Well, could I pray?' I'm right there for them. And if that's what you mean by a leader, I'm ready because them prayers is about the only way that I can make it through life. And while living you'll meet a lot of people on the street that want to be talked to, you know. And I tell you something else I do just about every day of my life.

When I goes to Shaw's and them old womens come in on the days that they bring them over on the bus, I take my time, sit down and talk to them. 'Hi, young ladies, you're all here today.' You know, stuff like that. They older people; some of them is 80 and 90, you know. A lot of people don't take time to talk to them; because, see if I live long enough I'll be there, and you gotta take time to talk to them. And they love to see me coming, too, you know. I dislike a person ways when they think they better than anybody else on account they got, on account of they got a little more. But love helped and love is the best thing in the world. That's the way I feel about it, you know.

What are some special and unique things about the African American community here in Portland?

Pardon?

What are some special and unique things about the African American community here in Portland?

Well, if you really want the truth, I'm not around too many of my Black peoples; it's mostly white peoples I'm around. Because, seems like my race of peoples is very independent, the ones that I know. And I'm kinda shy about asking them is they okay, do they need anything. Because you know how independent we can get. So, most of the people that I talk to is white. And thank God for Jesus I do. And most every time I talk to them most everybody be needing some kind of help. You know. Not just money and stuff like that, some of them just be want you to come sit and talk to them, or read the Bible to them. I got one lady that she said, 'I don't wanna burden you.' 'Don't say you're burdening me, just call and tell me.' And I'm on, I'm on call. I don't know if nobody know about it or not, but I'm on call. That they're there by themself and they call on me. You know that old saying that say, 'I'm fall and I can't get up'? Well, I get a lot of those calls, and I go over and check on them. And I love it because they're independent; they don't want to give up their homes and they stay by themselves. But what I do is, I sit and I tell them, 'Stop getting up so fast.' That's the main thing wrong with our older peoples, they turn too quick and they get up too fast. But when they call me, I'm there for them. You know. And my husband, he able to take care of himself. And I get in my car and I run over. One lady was on the floor, and I go and I pick her up

and sit there with her, have coffee with her and then go. And the if vice versa it be me, I'd do the same thing. It's good to be able to be there, be there for them. And I'm so glad I am like I am.

You know, something happened when I, long years ago when I was a little girl to my uncle—my mother's brother—do by the white folks. And I'm so glad that I didn't hate from that. Sickening, and you really don't want to get that in your heart. You know, like you... We seen this happen to my uncle and we didn't want, we didn't you know. And I didn't grow up really hating, but it was kinda bad for, but it was a farmer. And at first I—it terrified me, you know; like, 'This the way it's gonna be all the time?' You know. But my dad would sit me down and talk and tell me, this is life and that's the way, that's the way it mosta be. So.

Is there anything else you would like to add to this interview about your family, your community, or your personal leadership?

No, I guess that's about all. But I, I love my husband's family, too. He got so many brothers and things, and they are very good mens. So, other than that...I'm a person that, I like the family to cling. That's the way; I just want it to cling all the time, you know.

Your husband is in Maine?

Oh yes, he at home. Where you thought my husband was at?

Huh?

Where you thought he was at?

I thought he was dead or something.

No, my first husband is dead. But I'm married to Mr. Jackson; he's in South Portland. The reason why, I wonder why they didn't ask him to come, you know. 'Cause Rachel knows that I have a husband, and me and him have a 32-year-old baby that live with us. [laughter] That's mine and his baby, 32 years old.

A little baby?

32 years old baby. [laughter]

And you guys have been married 34 years, right?

Yeah, we've been married 34 years. See, what happened, I had 5 children by my first husband; he died. But I got one child by Mr. Jackson, my daughter. Yeah, so, now it's just us three.

How many children did you have again?

I had six.

You had six.

I had my oldest daughter died five years ago. And now I have four sons and a daughter. I have one son in Westbrook; he work for the City of Portland. I have one son in Brunswick; he work for the--what would you call that--alcoholic place. And my oldest son worked for Blue Rock 19 years and got hurt, and he's on disability. And my number three son, he work for Portland Glass. And then I got all these beautiful grandsons working for different things.

Oh, Alvin, the one you were talking about. Did he graduate from Portland High, class of '99?

Yes, you know him? I thought you knowed him. Isn't he something?

Afro, tall..

But he done cut the hair off. Yeah, he cut the hair off. Like it...looks good.

Every time he shoots the ball it's a bucket.

That's him, that's him. Sure is. He's in Elmira College now. I'm so proud. You know that he lost his grandpa on his mother's side.

Yeah he told me.

Yeah, he died. So you all native home is here?

Huh?

You all native home is here?

No, I was born in Somalia. Both us are born in Somalia.

I was born in Somalia but I moved when the war started in 1990.

You all some pretty young ladies, pretty skin. I look at you all on TV a lot of time. And my grandson will say, 'When I grow up, I'm gonna marry her. I'm gonna marry her.' I say, 'She'll be too old for you.' And he goes to a daycare with the mother. He turned five in January, then they got one is four years old, and the baby. And they all go to the same nursery together. And the oldest boy—the teacher call me, say, 'Mrs. Jackson, every time we change him up, we got to let him go by and check on his sister and brother.' 'Let me check on my sister and my brother before I go down.' [laughter] I think that's cute.

Thank you for allowing me to interview you today. This is the end of the "Home Is Where I Make It" interview with Mrs. Rose Jackson.

Okay, thank you.