

Interview with Mrs. Flourine Brown

April 22, 2010

Interviewers: Stephen Antalis, Sterling Hill, Ashley Remington, and Deborah Singleton

Sterling: Mrs. Brown, we are glad that you could join us today, and I am glad that you are feeling better.

Mrs. Fluorine Brown: Well, thank you.

Sterling: How long have you been a congregation member at Macedonia?

Mrs. Brown: I've been here since I was thirteen years old. We was in tithing then, and I am seventy nine.

Sterling: What was that atmosphere like at Macedonia during the civil rights movement?

Mrs. Brown: Well, civil rights movement didn't have no girls, young girls. Civil rights done started; I was a teenager then in high school. You see what I, you want to know what I do? What I've been doing? (Yes we would) Well I was picketing, and I was put in jail for sitting down with the kids cause I was over there with all the kids, and we got on the bus, and we was arrested for getting on the bus to sit down. If you rode the bus at that time, blacks were, you could pay in the front and go in the back. Then, when they changed it around, you go in, you put your money down, but you still went in the back door walking on down; don't stop in the front.

Sterling: Reverend Smith said that you were involved with Dr. King. What was that like?

Mrs. Brown: He was a good fellow; a nice person. He thought that I was able to do most anything a woman could do. And I became the first president of the NAACP in Macon. And after this man, I was advised to him until he moved on again. Then I became the president.

Sterling: What was it like as president?

Mrs. Brown: Hm?

Sterling: What were the tensions like as president?

Mrs. Brown: It was nice. You got a lot of that, they was wondering could a woman do this. Well if you put your mind to it, you could do anything you want to do. And so I did, and we got along fine. Houses didn't get burned by whites and this and that and the other. We got along very smoothly with the NAACP.

Then I went to work at the Dempsey Hotel, and I was the only black in. There was seven white girls and one black, and this man came in there with a overall and beat up and looking ugly, he was white, sat at my station. I said, now ain't no reason to sit on my station. Ok, he sat on my station. I went over and ask

him could I help him. He said yes. I got what he wanted and went back in the kitchen, and I done raise all kinds of saying. Cause I knew he wasn't going to tip me you know, so I came back, and I went back out again and raised saying again. And you might not believe this; he got through and didn't tell me thank you or nothing. He went upstairs. Mr. Herbert and Earl Block owned the Dempsey Hotel and Restaurant. And I said I know he gonna get me fired: that's what I thought. He went up there, all he was a beat up joker you know. I didn't know he was a FBI going to see if black girls could work in there with white girls. And I was the only black one in there and the rest of them were seven white girls. So he found out that we could do that cause he sat there for the longest, with them old ragged overhauls. I just go back and kiss him cause [laughs] ok. When he got ready to go, he act like he was mad. So he went up the stairs, and I said that man done got me fired I guarantee you cause I was looking ugly at him since he wasn't going to smile, see. So he went up there, and he did whatever he had to do up there, and he came back down and he left. So Mr. Earl Block, Earl Block owned the hotel, he called me up there, and I said that man got me fired cause I knew I was a looking ugly, I just didn't talk back or nothing. I went up there and he a hundred dollar bill with them old ragged overhauls. He wasn't as ragged as I thought he was; he was the FBI man. Wanted to see if a black girl could work in there with white girls. See, I didn't know all of that, see. But its best to keep your mouth and everything else closed when you don't know things.

So I left there, and I went to JC Penny. I became the first black sales person there. And I enjoy working there and everybody said well "Why didn't they hire nobody else?", and I said I don't know. You'd have to ask them who they'd hire. And I stayed there about three years, and I left and went to another job out on a country club. Aint nothing but rich people who lived out there. And everybody out there liked me so, everywhere I go, I was making it see. And some of the girls who went out there couldn't stay, you see. So they figured that, they didn't know what was happening. I didn't know what was happening, but I know how to treat people. You got to know how to treat people and say yes sir and no mam. Well, that don't bother me. Whether they black, blue, or green, or white, or whatever. They just come.

Stephen: What year was this, roughly?

Mrs. Brown: Let's see now, let me see. I'm seventy-nine now. That's when I was eighteen years old. That was a long time. But I goes back there right now. I used to go out there every Monday, say they used to let blacks play golf out there every Monday. And I learned how to play golf out there. I've always got along with people. No white or black or whatever; it don't make no difference to me cause you just got to place, you better, you can't say yes and no. If you aint gonna say yes mam, say yes. Don't say Ya, Naw and all kind of flat talking and all that. You know that won't never get you anyplace.

You see, so I went higher and higher and went off of to college now, to Florida A&M, and I enjoyed down there. I was a scholar that I feel; I didn't know that I could make B+s all the time. [laughs] I was pretty good. Now I came back here, I said, and they integrated the school on, I can't call the name of that school right now, but it's on College Street. What's the name of that school? It used to be on another street. [Mount de Sales?] Mount de Sales, no. Where it is now they have first grade through the seventh grade. It's between, it's almost to that doctor's building. After you pass the doctor's building on old Third Street you make a left turn, you almost, you almost to this place, to the school, when you

make the left. But anyhow, I went there and I taught my pastor, Eddie D. Smith's four children. He had one child in the fourth grade, and the other one in the third grade. You talking man, you won't be young as bad youngins. [laughs] I tell them this all the time. But anyhow I said they were there.

Then I left there and became the hostess of the Dempsey again cause I liked that kind of job. Then I just, I just one thing and the other, I become president of the NAACP at that time. Martin Luther King was there, and I went to her up there when and this woman, I can't recall her name right now, but she once sat on the bus and wouldn't get up and went to jail. [Rosa Parks] Rosa Parks. And I came back down here and sat on the front, and they put me in jail, too. But we did get a chance to sit anywhere you wanted to sit. It wasn't necessarily we wanted to sit on the front, but when there was nowhere else for you to sit, so I sat on the front. And I just went on through like, now I became the president of the NAACP here then. And the vice president was a Jim Marshall. He's still here, too. And I just went on through everything that I needed to go through with. And everybody enjoyed me because I treated everybody right.

Stephen: Did you do a lot work with church during this time, or was it mostly with the NAACP?

Mrs. Brown: Lot of people didn't go to, you didn't go to white churches. My pastor, his name was Calhoun. And I, we went, come in this building, this building right here. We weren't allowed to walk on the side of the street over here. Me and no, Mr. Randall and I. But anyhow we came here and they put us in jail. Then Mr. Randall was a big man, a black man in time he started letting us come. Jimmy Walters was the president, was the preacher. And then he started letting me and Mr. Randal come in anytime we got ready. Sure did.

Stephen: What about coordinating with the black churches in the area? What sort of thing occurred during the civil rights movement at that time?

Mrs. Brown: Just went to a regular church. Our church was in Tybee at that time. Almost the one church that sat in the middle of the street, or Hazel Street. And we was on the right hand side there where the lard factory was, where they made lard and stuff.

Mrs. Singleton: Did the black churches work together during the civil rights movement?

Mrs. Brown: Work together doing what?

Mrs. Singleton: Did they work together like coming together as one trying to push this?

Mrs. Brown: You had some people, they was chosen because they wasn't afraid. See some people was afraid white people would do something to them, but they was afraid you'd do something to them. So you just go and do what you had to do. Nobody whip me, nobody never call me the n word. But they could have cause we called them the c word, cracker. So you know, what goes around comes around. See you can't call people names and not get called something back. Now I enjoyed that.

I enjoyed up to the court house. I was the bailiff, the first black female bailiff went up there, and I was the first sales clerk at JC Penney. And I everywhere I was the first person that got a job by being black. And they said I was in hook with people; I wasn't neither. I just know how to carry myself. Now I wasn't going in there with raising no saying and talking no yell and naw and don't know how you talk, should talk to people. And I got along fine, sure did. Got any job I wanted. If I wanted a job I could get it, cause I knew how to get it. I didn't go in there talking yell and naw and talking like an ignorant person. So, then I became the leader of the kids. And I tried to teach them, it's a lot of parents didn't want, don't want their children to be taught right. If they can't, well if you can't teach them right, you ought to let somebody teach them how to say yes and no, yes mam and no sir. Stead of ya and naw and all that crap. You see you gotta, you gotta know how to act with people. I don't care if their black, white, blue, green, whatever color. Just know how to treat them. And I had no problem with white people; still don't have no problem with white people.

Stephen: Did you have problems, you mentioned getting arrested several times, what where those circumstances like?

Mrs. Brown: Well, to tell you the truth, we had some black cops. They start on Mulberry Street. You don't know about the Piggly Wiggly, used to be on Mulberry Street. They couldn't go no further from Third Street corner where Piggly Wiggly was, down to Broadway, from down to Broadway to Cherry Street, never go up Cherry Street. Then they'd get whooped up or in jail. Cause see the bus station was over there where it is right now, but you wasn't allowed over there except if you were going in the black, colored, they had it colored in there, they didn't ever say black. And we got along fine in Macon. We got along better in Macon than anywhere in the United States cause people were killing and beating and burning up houses and everything. Nothing like that never happened in Macon. We had a good leader, Mr. Randall was a good leader. His son is the first black judge in Macon. Billy's at the jail courthouse right now in there. So we didn't have no trouble.

Sterling: How has the racial tension influenced young, not so much just black, but young white and black children today? Like do you think they take it for granted?

Mrs. Brown: Yes, no, I don't think so. I don't think you have no problems. I've gone to the white churches since they've been integrated. And I never had no problems. You got to go in there, now you got to go in there straight, too. You can't go in there being one of what they call you. They used to say a nigger, that's what they used to say, you know. You can't go in there acting like one for real. See you got to go in there and have to know how to sit, how to talk to people and all that. See you gotta know what you know. I'll just be frank with you.

Mrs. Singleton: Mrs. Fluorine, do you think that young people appreciate what you all did during the civil rights movement?

Mrs. Brown: No, they say, "I can't stand Fluorine Brown, she make me sick." Now if you hate me, no. And she tell people I try to out dress people; I don't try to out dress, I just aint going to be raggedy. I sure aint. And I'm going to be myself. And I know cause Joseph and Neal; I could go in there and get anything I wanted. I could get anything I wanted. Mr. Cherry used to say, "Don't let Fluorine come in my store." Somebody say, "well, why she can't come in the store, she buy stuff from here?" He said, "No she don't. He'll done give it to her." That aint why she did, she kept me, she kept me cold. She sure did.

Mrs. Singleton: What would you tell us as young people today to remember about the civil rights movement? What would you advise us to do in terms of remembering what you all did for us?

Mrs. Brown: Just forget being black. Just be yourself and some people, black folk like black folk, some black folk. And black folks like some white people. So go in and mix and go. I know some people married to white men, and I know some white women, some black men married to white men. I sure do. So what's the difference though? If you like somebody, love somebody, you don't care what color they are. But they gonna talk about you. Ya, they gonna talk about you. But that don't make no difference neither. But you can't be everything, so I enjoyed it myself cause I didn't have no problems with white people. I speak good morning and go on. Well they's like she didn't speak, she didn't say nothing, that poor with somebody else. I say I don't care, I say good morning. Next time I saw them they said good morning. You gotta give people a chance. You can't make nobody like you now. You see just be nice yourself, and they'll come around. I tell black children right now when I go sometime to the different schools. Some of them don't know how to said yes, no, yes mam, no sir. They said, "Ya, Naw." I said boy where'd you come from? I said your momma aint taught you a thing, and you can tell her I said it. [laughs], cause she better come up there messing with me and up there at the school now. But I was telling him the truth. You can't just say anything; you know it's the way you talk. Whether you like somebody or not. So, they don't like me. A lot of black folks don't like me, I know that. But I don't care cause I'm going to be right. I aint going to be wrong now and one of them do that.

Stephen: What was some of the stuff that the black people would do to you?

Mrs. Brown: What would they do to me? They just said she thinks she this and they're right here in this church. I'm a member of this church. I became one of the first members to come over here after you know after our other pastors went through. See Reverend Smith wasn't the pastor then, but anyway, they don't like me. I know several of them who don't like me. I go sometime, come to church and I hear them say, "They have the old woman; she ought a she sit down somewhere. She blab blab blab and this and that and the other, but I don't take time to listen. I get where I turn around and told one but when you get my age, 79 years old, you going to be, honey, you gonna look like Grandma Gruddy or somebody. I say you just try to do like I'm doing. I try, I don't mistreat nobody, I don't hate white people. I said I don't care what they are.

They used to call me, she a nigger lover, cause I had a lot of white friends. Mr. Robert Train, he owned all this stoves and all the plants, you know peanuts and stuff. He used to, my momma use to take us over there to work with her; we sit down at a table with them. And one day I went under the bed at that

Persian cat, and he tore my face up. I had to have some skin grafts, but they paid for it, they paid for it. And I aint had no problems with white people, I really haven't. But they tell me a lot of times, Oh, you call me the n word too. You can leave white folks up. I said I treat anybody right who treat me right. I say you can be white, blue, black, or green. I said you just treat people right. Say if you don't like them sometime say good morning or good afternoon you know. You don't have to go home and sleep with them now. But a lot of people don't know that. They don't want to know it. They just want to be always saying some ugly that they don't need to say.

And you find you have got some white friends, I'll say I love them cause they nice to me. They say, aw, they give you this and that and the other. Mr. Tame, who's from Stephens, they used to give me, Mrs. Heller used to give me some stuff myself. Mr. Airs I don't want you to give Fluorine another damn thing. [laughs] I didn't care what he said. That's what crazy about me. So she give me socks and slippers and panties and this and that and the other. And he knew that she was giving it to me. And he, he didn't want her to give it to me, but she gave it to me. I just never had no problems. They say I aint nothing but, she aint nothing but a nigger who loves white folks. I say "Well I love you too." [laughs] And then I go on the other side and start cussing, I tell you, you know how good I cuss now. [laughs] But I'm doing fine. People say, "Well how old do you say you are?" Seventy-nine, born in 1931. I aint never forget. My momma was born in 1913. Her birthday was January 11th, my birthday was January 10th. So I'm doing fine. And hope I get forty more years old. [laughs] I think y'all feel me too, I feel I'm gonna get that off my chest.

Stephen: What were the types of treatment that you got when doing all those sit-ins from the authorities or from the black community?

Mrs. Brown: But see, I'm a person. You got to kill me or know how to talk to me. See, I've been told, "nigger, get up out of that seat." I get up just as kindly and go and sit in another. If I had to go up and down anywhere I was, I would sit in another seat. But I wasn't going out of there now, less he throwed me out of there. But other than that, I didn't have no, really I didn't have no, so help me God, I didn't have no problems. Cause I treat people right, and they treat me right. Now they didn't invite me to come home to eat dinner with them, that was alright too. But they were nice to me. See I'm a person, I don't, you know I don't think everybody dislike people. Cause every white person don't dislike black people. And every black person don't dislike white people.

Mrs. Singleton: How was it in jail, Mrs. Fluorine? When they put you in jail, how was that?

Mrs. Brown: When you looking through those bars. [laughs] We hollering, and hollering out the windows. You know where the courthouse is here in Macon? Ok they used to; you'd to could holler out that window to the ground. And I am the first black female bailiff there. There were, I'm trying to think who, Bloodworth, ask your momma who Bloodworth was. He was the first sheriff down there.

Mrs. Singleton: Who bailed you all out Mrs. Fluorine?

Mrs. Brown: Mr. Randall, he could get us out from anywhere. White people liked Mr. Randall. He was just as black as that suit you got on, but he was nice man and educated and had good sense. All white people like, everybody like Billy though. Billy the first black judge down at the courthouse.

Mrs. Singleton: Who were some of the other preachers that marched, that were in the civil rights movement?

Mrs. Brown: Jim Marshall, Reverend, he dead, light skinned tall man, I can't remember his name. Reverend, he was up there to that church on Cotton Avenue. You know Reverend, he, ya, he dead. And then the guy who was at First Baptist Church. You had a lot of people involved that wasn't afraid. See but you have to take a chance. Now if you act like you human and not act like what people were calling you then, then you could get along with them. You see, cause some of us do act like one. And you know white man told me one time, say, all of them act like, all of the white folk two act like niggers sometime. You see that's just a word they say, you see. So that don't bother me. Cause like I say anybody can be that. So I got along with everybody. I really did, and they say I was a nigger who loved white folks. I said well let me love them and keep walking. I never had no fights or nothing with nobody about that.

Mrs. Singleton: Did you have friends that were killed in the civil rights movement, or hurt?

Mrs. Brown: Yes, June Barns got hurt one time. The first black, he fat, I can't call the name. Say like he was the first police, deputy, he the first deputy in Atlanta. He was a heavy set, and then he became the first mayor. You know who I am talking about? He was there. They mayor, that's right.

Mrs. Singleton: How did you feel when Dr. King was killed, assassinated?

Mrs. Brown: I felt real bad. I figured that if they killed Martin, they'd kill you too now, so best thing that you can do is do the best you can. But I, people say, well, you was a nigger who loved white folks. No, it wasn't that, I just knows how to talk to people and get around. No white people never ever, so help me God, tried to do nothing to me. They say I loved white folks cause I didn't dip in and go to them. I don't like a whole lot of mess. Cause all white folks aint bad, like all black folks aint bad. You learned that since you've been born, see what I'm saying. Now you don't have to go home and sleep with them. So, but you need to know how to treat people. And if you meet somebody who grown and you a child, you supposed to say yes sir and no mam and all that. Not bet because they white; just you supposed to do.

Mrs. Singleton: Do you know of anybody's house that was burned during the civil rights movement?

Mrs. Brown: I don't remember nobody's houses, they throw gas and stuff around Mrs. Reynolds's house but it didn't burn. Sure did.

Stephen: Do you know of any pastors or anything who were opposed to any of the marches or the movement?

Mrs. Brown: Well, Reverend Malone, Reverend Long, Reverend with that dark skin guy who used to preach at First Baptist too. Well, Mr. Randall, he was preacher. Oh you just had several preachers, [they were for the movement?] Yes.

Stephen: What did they argue against it? What did they say the problem were with it?

Mrs. Brown: Well, the only thing that, seeing how there weren't no blacks. I was the first one who, like I say who get in somewhere, who get a job. I don't know whether, well you know I aint light skinned. I just know how to treat them and I've got more just than anybody. Anybody will tell you, I'm not lying; I got more jobs than anybody in town worth anything. I didn't have to go and wash dishes in a restaurant or whatever. See, but you gotta know, you gotta be right yourself too now. I don't care how black you is or how white you are, you gotta be right though, see.

Mrs. Singleton: So really it was more about jobs, Mrs. Fluorine, not, we wanted good jobs and that was part of it?

Mrs. Brown: If you wanted one, you gonna be neatly dressed. You gonna know how to say yes sir and no mam. What difference does that make? I don't be said, I said you gonna be talking ya and naw, you aint never gonna keep no jobs and go be in there how I'm saying. You might as well remember that. So don't get mad with them. You the one cut your own throat. See that, they don't like me for a lot of reasons when they say I'm a nigger loving white folks. I just know how to treat people and they've always seem to have known how to treat me. You know and they didn't invite me to dinner all the time and all that. But you know, blacks don't invite you no time unless you got some corn bread and soup. I tell you honey, you gotta know how to be. And they don't like me to say it. Oh, you a white folks lover. So, I'm no lover. I just like people who treat me right. I can treat them right.

Stephen: Do you remember if churches or black churches in the community made statements about the marches or was it just pastors involved and at their community?

Mrs. Brown: You didn't have very many preachers, you had very few now who was crazy enough to get out there like I was. If you are going to die, if they going to kill you, they going to kill you at home. I know houses that were burned down, I know black houses that were burned down to the ground. But they got out. But see some time you have to, you have to, but he worked it for this man and all. And they had some words and he said some things he shouldn't say and the man says some things. And they said, I always said they thought he won when he said they burned the house down, white man him doing like that. They couldn't ever prove it. You can think whatever you want to, but you have to have some proof.

Stephen: Well, I think we need to stop now because the church service is about to start.

Sterling: Thank you for your time.

Mrs. Brown: Nice meeting you, my name's Fluorine Brown. Now don't forget my name.

Sterling: Yes, Ma'am.

[laughs]