

## EVELYN PRATT -- NAACP

### Pre interview talk, 1 minute

JM: I guess we're ready. My name is Judith Monachina, and I'm the Director of the Housatonic Heritage Oral History Center at Berkshire Community College, and I'm with Evelyn Pratt, and this is a part of the NAACP Oral History Project. This is an interview for that project, and with us in the room are Wendy Germain—she does the sound; and also in the room is Len Kates, NAACP liaison for this project; and last but not least, your husband, Reverend Pratt. We're in the *Berkshire Eagle* podcast studio, and we'll just sort of have a conversation. We'll start right off at the beginning. Can you tell me where and when you were born and a little bit about your childhood?

**EP:** Wow. Well, I was born Evelyn Judy Pratt; no, actually, I was born Evelyn Judy Gammon, and I was born in the city of Columbus, Ohio in 1948, July.

**JM:** Warm month.

**EP:** Very nice.

**JM:** Columbus, Ohio.

**EP:** Right.

**JM:** So were there other children already in the family?

**EP:** I had an older brother, Herman, Jr., named after my dad, and I have after me—I'm the second oldest—there were three others after me, and my sister, Deborah. I have a brother, Nathaniel, and a younger brother, Larry.

**JM:** So all together five? Did I get it right?

**EP:** Yes.

**JM:** You were in Columbus, Ohio. Can you talk a little bit about your street? Can you picture where you were when you were a kid?

**EP:** Oh, yeah. It's like a fond memory to me. I guess when I was born, I might have been living with my paternal grandmother. I can remember a little bit about that. I remember little incidents of gates when I was a baby or whatever and we couldn't go down the stairs or something, and my dad had bought a house. It was on Grant Avenue, and we stayed at 1185 Grant Avenue,

Columbus, Ohio, and so I learned that when he bought the home, it didn't have a basement, and he was such a handyman.

I remember my dad being a handyman when we were kids, and any little job you wanted done—plumbing, electric, I don't care what—but our house did not have a basement. It was, I guess, back in the day, and so he made a committed effort to dig his basement out, and he did. He dug the basement out, and we didn't have a furnace. This is back in the day, and you know how they had the blown air and things like that? We had a central gas heater, I remember, in our basic living area, and the furthest room away from that area had a fireplace, and so my dad and mom stayed in there, and then my sister's room and my brothers' rooms were right off of that main heating area. So one year, my dad decided we were going to get a furnace, and so that's one of the reasons he dug that basement out, put that furnace in there, and we had blown hot air all over the house.

**JM:** And it felt so luxurious.

**EP:** It was really good.

**JM:** Everybody was warm.

**EP:** Oh, yes. Before that furnace, we were running for that hot gas furnace.

**JM:** That's a fun memory.

**EP:** I can remember icicles on the windows so thick. I mean, it was cold in the winter.

**JM:** Columbus. I'm not really sure about what the climate is like in Columbus.

**EP:** It's not extremely cold, but it gets cold. I remember going to school one year, it was 10 below zero. That's cold enough.

**JM:** Cold enough for me.

**EP:** I know.

**JM:** So going to school, did you walk to school?

**EP:** Yes, we did. We walked. We were walkers. Weinland Park Elementary School, that was my claim to fame.

**JM:** Did you like it?

**EP:** It was all right. It was good. Like I said, my brother was the oldest. Our house was situated on Grant Avenue, and we were abutted against, I think it was 6<sup>th</sup> Street, and then there was 5<sup>th</sup> Street, and then 4<sup>th</sup> Street, and that's where our school was off of 4<sup>th</sup> near Summer Street, so we walked all the way through those little areas. Our neighbors were very neighborly, watched out for you.

**JM:** Can you talk a little bit about that? So with the neighbors, did you know them?

**EP:** Oh, yeah. Miss Huff was on one side of the alley, and Mrs. Delaney was on the other. She was an older woman.

**JM:** Were they nice?

**EP:** Yeah, they were nice, and they always looked out. My mother always went over to Mrs. Delaney's house. I have one bad memory about that, though. When I was a child, Mrs. Delaney grew a lot of beautiful flowers, and she had a yard, a garden in the back, and so when I left my back yard, I was facing her back yard, and we were always told never go in her yard. "Don't bother her gardens. Don't mess with nothing." As children, we would play these baseball games, and we'd bat the ball, and she says, "If you all hit that ball in my yard, it's mine. You're not getting it back."

**JM:** Was she good for her word?

**EP:** Oh, yes, indeed, she was good for her word, and when I grew up, I ended up visiting Mrs. Delaney, and she had balls all over her window, three or four windows full of balls.

**JM:** That's too funny. She was a character.

**EP:** Yes, she was.

**JM:** You said you had a bad memory. Was that the bad memory?

**EP:** Well, not quite.

**JM:** It was another bad memory.

**EP:** Yeah, it was a little bit bad. So anyway, she had these beautiful flowers, and I had the thought to say I wanted to get my mom some flowers, and so I was walking through this alley, this alley I had to go through every day to go to school and all the other things, so I saw this little cute, pretty little purple flower and one little yellow flower, and I picked it up. I picked it, and it

had happened to be in her yard, and I was going to bring it to my mother, just to be nice, and so I went and I presented it to my mom, and she was upset. “Where did you get these flowers?” and I’m like, “Mrs. Delaney’s.” She was upset with me, and I had to go back and apologize to Mrs. Delaney for picking. She said, “Oh, those are just field flowers. It doesn’t matter.” So it just made me feel so bad that Mom had thought I did something wrong.

**JM:** It was a sweet idea.

**EP:** Yeah, and it got shot down quick.

**JM:** It was the wrong sweet idea. It’s very interesting, children. Well, you learned, I guess.

**EP:** Oh, boy, uh-huh.

**JM:** The hard way.

**EP:** Never hit balls in Mrs. Delaney’s yard, and don’t pick none of her flowers.

**JM:** Even though she didn’t really seem to mind about the flowers.

**EP:** Not that one, no, not those, but she had some other ones that I would no way—

**JM:** Do you think she was nicer about those flowers, because you had come to her?

**EP:** No. I think she realized it could have been anything. My mother didn’t know. She just figured that if I was in Mrs. Delaney’s yard picking her flowers, she didn’t want that to happen, so that was the main message.

**JM:** So more about the neighborhood, so there was Mrs. Delaney. Where did your neighborhood begin and end? Do you have a sense of that?

**EP:** Yeah. Well, of course, Columbus, Ohio is a large city, and our main borders were East 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. East 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue is a very, very busy street, and we weren't to go past there, not playing, and Grant Avenue was like one of the side streets, very quiet kind of, and we bordered on a factory. Columbus Coated Fabrics was across the street as our view. Every morning, Columbus Coated Fabrics out the front door, and down the street would be east, would be East 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and then as I went south through that little alley, then I would be going toward my little elementary school.

**JM:** So you really quickly as a kid learned where you go, where it ends.

**EP:** Yeah, uh-huh, and we knew better than to go out of our neighborhood. We had that little streetlight rule: streetlights come on, you get home.

**JM:** So you had freedom?

**EP:** Pretty much. Well, I'll say one little incident in my childhood was the loss of my mother, and I lost my mother when I was seven years old, and I was pretty young, and that was a little dramatic change in my life. I didn't know what was going to happen. It was one of those times that I was going to school. We were so close to the school that we would go to school and come home for lunch, so we went to school that one morning, and we came back, and my next-door neighbor, this guy named Bobby, he was about maybe a year younger than me, he said, "Oh, what's going on? Oh, somebody in your house died." I'm like, "What?" I'm like, "What is that?"

Back in the day, they used to put these little wreaths or a box on your house with flowers on it, and so I'm like, "Huh?" I had never seen or heard of it. I don't know how ever heard it, but somehow he knew that something had happened, and I'm like, "Really?" So it wasn't five, ten minutes later that my father comes running up, because he was so close to where he worked. He worked at Timken Roller Bearing, and he would walk to work and walk home, and this time he came home, and he scooped us up, the ones that were in school—myself, my brother, and my little sister. So my two younger brothers were home with my mom, I guess.

**JM:** How did she die?

**EP:** They said it was some kind of pneumonia. I remember the morning was so vivid. She wasn't a very emotional person, but she said, "I want you to give me a kiss before you leave." That's one of those things, and that morning we came in to give her a kiss, and I wasn't really feeling good after that flower thing.

**JM:** This was soon after the flower thing.

**EP:** Yeah, kind of like in that same year or something, and I was wondering why she's so temperamental today, and she says, "I don't want no kiss this morning," and so she said, "Tell Herman to come in here." That's my oldest brother. So she sent Herman, "Go get Miss Huff. I'm not feeling well," but she said, "but I want you all to go to school," so she sent us off, and then by the time we came back, I met my friend.

**JM:** So she really knew she was not well.

**EP:** Wasn't feeling well, uh-huh.



**JM:** So how did you deal with that? Did you all stay put, or did you have to go move somewhere?

**EP:** Well, that was the thing. Of course, I had my two grandmothers. I had my maternal grandmother, which is my mom's mother, and my paternal grandmother, which Dad was there and his family. She lived at I almost like to call a group home. It was her and some of my dad's sisters. There was Hazel, and I think my grandmother had her sister there, so I guess whatever you call it, a family home. We went to live with them.

**JM:** All of you?

**EP:** All five of us, yeah. We thought that was great. She was a good cook.

**JM:** So there was at least that. You were in a family's home, and you were with each other.

**EP:** Yes, we were with each other, and my grandmother, my aunt was there with her. Besides that, my grandfather was sick. I never knew anything about death basically until my mother passed. If people died, it didn't phase me, but after that it was like, wow. It was really a reality, and other people in the family, it was so permanent. That was my first exposure to death like that.

**JM:** Of course. You were still young.

**EP:** Yeah, very. I thought so.

**JM:** And your father, did he come with you?

**EP:** Dad was very kind to me. My father was a kind person, loving and everything, so we were staying with Grandmother. I think we were there maybe two, three weeks, but after that happened, Dad got the house set up, and my church, the church that we attended as children, we had a church mother there. I didn't even know her. I couldn't tell you who she was before that, but she had said to us that, "Your mother always asked me to come and help her with her kids, so that's why I'm coming to help your dad right now," so she did. She came and lived with us after my mother passed away.

Oh, she had everything fixed so nice, had beautiful sheets and blankets and all this nice stuff in the house, and so we got up in the morning, and everybody was lining up in the kitchen. What's going on? So I came in and she says, "Turn the lights on," and we had those fluorescent lights in our kitchen, and when you turn the fluorescent lights on, they don't come on right away. They take about five, ten seconds delay, so said, "Put it on," and then it came on, and then she said, "How old are you?" I said, "Seven." She said, "You know how old I am?" I thought she was 100, but I said I'd better not say that, because her hair was snow white. She said, "Well, I'm 70 years old." I said, "Oh." I never forgot that.

**JM:** Seventy, what did that seem like?

**EP:** Ancient.

**JM:** As much as 100.

**EP:** Yes, that too, so that was my first remembrance of her. I said, "Oh, my God."

**JM:** What was her name?

**EP:** Her name was Martha Harriston [ph].

**JM:** And how did you come to find her after a while in your house?

**EP:** She was basically our guide and teacher. She was like the mother figure, really grandmother would maybe be better. She was basically old-fashioned, but she was good. She was very principled, and I think she got us into order. The very significant thing about Martha Harriston, she told us that her mother was a former slave. I'm like, "What?" That was going back; not her, but her mom, and I'm like, hmm, so she had memories of being in Roanoke, Virginia and other places, and the job that her mother had was to raise the family children, so basically with her coming to our home, I think she was following in those lines of what her mother had done, raising children and so forth.

**JM:** So she got you ready for school and things like that?

**EP:** Oh, yeah, uh-huh, combed our hair and had us washing clothes. She was like I won't say a dictator, but she was a director in the house, so she really had us managed very well. That was so much opposite of my mom. I think my mother was like, "Oh, God, what do I do with all these kids," but this lady was very organized. She just knew how to deal with kids. She had me washing dishes, my sister drying the dishes. We had chores that we were able to do and basically trained us very well, I thought.

**JM:** So it sounds like between the time before your mother died and after, there was a change in sort of the mood in the house.

**EP:** Yeah.

**JM:** Would you say?

**EP:** Oh, yeah, uh-huh. It was probably for the better. I think she added something, a lot of quality to my life, though.

**JM:** Interesting. So she wasn't your mother.

**EP:** No.

**JM:** But she did okay?

**EP:** Yeah, she did okay. I guess the unfortunate part of it, I don't know, I almost look at my life in sevens. Seven years old, my mother, I lost her, and then Miss Martha Harriston came in for seven more years. She was on Social Security, and I don't know what happened. I don't know what happened, but somebody supposedly reported that she was doing housekeeping or something, and she was basically just living in our home, helping my dad, but somebody said to the Social Security people that she was doing another job, so they were going to cut her check.

**JM:** So she had to leave?

**EP:** Yeah. At 14, then I lost another, so to speak, mother in the home, and so, therefore, my father, he was working hard every day. He religiously worked, and you count on Dad, five minutes he's coming in that door. You could count on it. He would be just that precise. He'd just be very studious and faithful. He would come home every day like that. But after Martha left, I had to take up the mantle of cooking and cleaning, making sure things were done, so my grandmother, my maternal grandmother, she was always—that's one I credit my father for doing

is he kept us together, all five of us, and he also kept in touch with my grandmother, my maternal grandmother, which was my mom's mother.

We visited her every week. Every week we'd go by there, and she also mentored me in cooking and doing other little things, so when we found out Miss Martha had to leave, Grandmother said, "Well, look, I'm going to teach you how to cook a meal every week," and I'm like, "I'm 14 years old now," and so she said, "I know you don't want to be in the kitchen all day, so you're going to get these quick meal lessons," and so she did. She taught me how to make a meal every week.

**JM:** Do you remember any of those? What were those meals?

**EP:** Oh, yeah. Well, I don't know, I think she had a little Italian in her or something, because we made spaghetti. Oh, man, that smelled so good. I made a rice dish that had some vegetables in it, and she wanted me to be well-rounded and -balanced, and she said, "Something that's going to be quick. You don't need to be in that kitchen all day," and, of course, I'm in school. I had to come home and do whatever I had to do.

**JM:** Did your other siblings have tasks too?

**EP:** Oh, yeah, they had tasks. The boys had the trash. What else? I don't know. They delivered papers and stuff, all that stuff like that.

**JM:** And the girls, did they clean and stuff?

**EP:** Clean, the girls, me and my sister. We had our floors and dishes and tables, whatever, dusting, oh, yeah.

**JM:** You were busy.

**EP:** Oh, we were.

**JM:** You were busy taking care of a house and going to school.

**EP:** Yeah, so did that until I graduated. At 14, I was in the Indianola Junior High School, and then I went up to North High School, where I graduated from in 1966.

**JM:** So school, a little bit about school, do you remember any teachers that were particularly good or bad?

**EP:** Well, I can't remember the pronunciation, Mr. Kavaka, he was at North High School. One incident, if I go back to grade school, Miss Katula, she was my 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher, and one thing I thought was a little insensitive with her is, since my mother had passed away, I thought she was a little insensitive to me. We were reading a story about Humpty Dumpty, and I'd just gotten back in school after all this stuff, and it said, "Humpty Dumpty had a great fall, and all the kings' horses and all the kings' men couldn't put him back together again," and I was almost crying about that, and she says, "Oh, stop it," she says. No, she's not very sensitive at all toward the fact that I had lost my mom, and the idea of death or something, poor little Humpty Dumpty died or something.

**JM:** She didn't understand.

**EP:** She's just like, "Get over it. I'm not going to sit up here and pet you up over this," so that was one of the things that I remember. Mr. Kavaka, he was my homeroom teacher in high school, and I did have a teacher that taught sewing, and I can't remember her name, but I think I

credit her for teaching me some very positive skills. I'd learned some very excellent things from here, and I think she was an excellent teacher, because she didn't get tired of telling you, and she'd always say, "You can ask me anything. Just come back. If you didn't understand something, ask again," and I think that's very important, and that's why I think I got an excellent training in sewing, and I have done some tailoring since then. I picked up a lot of things from her, and I credit her for being one of the most excellent teachers I had from gaining that information from her.

**JM:** And she was patient.

**EP:** Yeah, patient.

**JM:** So you were growing up in Columbus, Ohio during a lot of the civil rights stuff.

**EP:** I sure was.

**JM:** So what was going on in Columbus, Ohio? Did you know about what was going on around?

**EP:** Yeah. We had our areas. Mt. Vernon Avenue was the black area, and we had the, what was that, East Market. It was on Mt. Vernon Street, and most of the people, the people of color, used to go there. My father would shop there. Maybe they felt like patronizing people who were in their vintage, or whatever, and I remember them talking about Martin Luther King, and I was like, boy, I was wondering why my father wouldn't want to join such a cause, because Martin Luther King seemed like he had—all this stuff was going on.

I don't think we had as bad an experience as having to go to the back of the buses or anything like that in Columbus, but there was subtle, you know what I mean, racism going on where you just knew better. You don't go there, the Valley Dale, places like that.

**JM:** Can you say some of those places? Where did you know not to go?

**EP:** The Valley Dale, it was like a skating area, and some of the downtown restaurants, man, you don't do that. You're not going to be welcome, but my father, I guess he was a very rational-thinking person, and I was like, "Boy, Daddy, why don't we get behind some of these things?" but I think in his life, he certainly experienced a lot of things racially and so forth, and basically he was like, "I ain't going to make no waves," basically. "I'm minding my own business. I'm staying out of trouble, and if it's not in my front door, I'm not going to bother it," basically.

**JM:** I wonder if having five kids sort of tempers your—

**EP:** I think that was it. Oh, yeah, uh-huh, and that was what he felt like he needed to do is I need to raise my kids, take care of you folks. I can't worry about what's going on someplace else, somewhere else, so I can't blame him for that.

**JM:** Did you experience anything like that Valley Dale in your school or anything? Was there any sort of off-limits?

**EP:** Well, I wasn't the one that was savvy about what's going on. It was subtle like. I'm saying those things were not blatant, but they were subtle. And my friend, I had a friend named Elaine Raglan, and she said, "Oh, I heard Mr. House,"—Mr. House was our principal, at the time, in North High School. I should say that my high school was 90% Caucasian. I was the only one.



There might have been one or two of us in a 30-classroom full of kids, and maybe one or two of us were of color in there, even though we might have had other nationalities there, but we of color, we were very few. You could count them.

And then I went to college-prep classes, and so that made us very low still in those classes, but my friend, Elaine Raglan, would say, "I heard Mr. House [ph] call one of the black brothers in there, and they were told, 'Don't ask any white girls out. He will be in his office.'" So they were not going to allow that at North High School.

**JM:** And so you heard that and you saw it, because you didn't see anybody dating.

**EP:** No. Oh, no, no, you wouldn't be. Never do that.

**JM:** You remember that. You remember her telling you that.

**EP:** Yeah. I was there. I guess she got inside information about what was going on.

**JM:** Do you remember how that made you feel?

**EP:** Well, I would be thinking, as they say, stay in your lane. That was the kind of thought which you had. You did what you were supposed to do and you didn't get outside, off that track, you're all right.

**JM:** But if you did?

**EP:** Oh, you would be talked to, or you'd be reprimanded in some kind of way.

**JM:** Did you have white friends?

**EP:** Yeah.

**JM:** So you could have friends.

**EP:** Oh, yeah.

**JM:** But not date.

**EP:** Uh-uh.

**JM:** That's the line. That was the lane.

**EP:** You don't cross that one, not there.

**JM:** And so your neighborhood was also a mixed neighborhood?

**EP:** No. My neighborhood was predominately black. I can't remember any neighbors to the right, to the left. Oh, yeah, we did have a white neighbor, I'm sorry, and on the way to the store, we had maybe one or two, and they had a dog. Oh, my God.

**JM:** On top of it.

**EP:** Oh, boy, they had a mean dog too. They were there, sure enough. As they say, they weren't socially interactive with us. "You all stay out of our yard. Don't you dare come over here." You know we weren't going either, not with that dog.

**JM:** Not picking any flowers there.

**EP:** Nope, not at all, not coming close.

**JM:** You have a lot of interesting memories, very vivid, visual memories. You can really picture things.

**EP:** Oh, yeah.

**JM:** So you were in high school. Do you remember thinking about, what am I going to do after high school? What were you thinking you were going to do after high school?

**EP:** My thought was I wanted to teach, and I was preparing to go to college, and I guess my financial situation wasn't that I could take advantage of that, in a way, because I thought about Capital University. I was a lot into music, because my father did provide us musical training when we were kids. And Capital University in Columbus, Ohio was at the top of the list for music, and I thought about going there, and then I thought about Ohio State, but it never happened. My father, he was very meticulous about finances, and he wasn't going to make no loans to do that. No, so it didn't materialize for me like that.

**JM:** So money.

**EP:** Yeah, money, money. Five kids and money.

**JM:** But you did continue with your music.

**EP:** Yeah, I did. I had private teachers, and they were good. I thought they were good.

**JM:** What did you have? What were your instruments?

**EP:** Basically, the piano, and then I advanced to the organ, which I enjoy. The piano to me is a lot of labor. You have to touch. You have to make it soft if you're going to do soft, thrusting motions if you're going to have it loud, and the organ you can just turn the volume up. The volume pedal, you just push it down as loud as you want it to be. That's much easier for me, so I enjoyed the variety of sounds that I could get on there as well.

**JM:** So the organ, was that a church thing? Did you have the organ at church?

**EP:** Yes.

**JM:** That's where you would find the organ, right?

**EP:** Yeah. That was where I found my organ.

**JM:** So did you go to church as a child?

**EP:** Oh, yes. My father was the deacon. He was the deacon, and I felt like every time church doors opened, we were there. He was there. He would make sure the heat was on, make sure it was cleaned up, and every time we had study or every time we had worship, we were there, all five of us.

**JM:** So you had a special place in the church. So church, so you liked church.

**EP:** Yeah, we liked church. Our cousins helped us to enjoy when you have your cohorts.

**JM:** So it was social as well.

**EP:** Yeah, oh, yeah. You've got your buddies there, people the same age as you are. One year they decided we need to be baptized. Now my little lady, Miss Harriston, she said, "Oh, so you all are going to get baptized?" She made sure. "You know what you're doing? When you go to get baptized, your life is changing now." I think I was around 12. I said, "Oh, okay," and, of course, we wanted to be baptized. We wanted to go to heaven. I did, my sister, and so she kind of prepped us for getting ready for that.

I remember our baptism was myself and some others and my brothers. All of us were in that vintage, almost like a bar mitzvah, in some ways. You know what I mean, rite of passage or something.

**JM:** So can you tell us about what it was like? Do you have special clothes you wore? How did it work?

**EP:** Yeah. We had to put on those white robes. We had to have a change of clothes when we got out, so we actually had a baptismal pool, and we were baptized, and we changed our clothes after we were done, and then we were told that we were supposed to have a new life after this. You're supposed to think different, not supposed to do those bad things, to say bad things after that. I was basically committing myself to reading the Word. I committed to read a chapter a day.

**JM:** Is that something you did as part—

**EP:** Myself.

**JM:** That was your own initiative.

**EP:** Myself. They didn't tell us to do it. I took that on myself. I was like, wow, I'm going to start reading the Word, the Bible.

**JM:** Did you start right at the beginning? Where did you start?

**EP:** I tried to, and then it was getting real difficult with all those names that were really long and hard to pronounce, so I might have started in the New Testament, and then I've committed to read all the way through, so I did that all the way. About three times I would do the Word. It was very good.

**JM:** When you went in the water, were you alone, when you went to the pool?

**EP:** Well, nobody got baptized with me.

**JM:** So you're alone when you get baptized.

**EP:** Yeah, oh, yeah.

**JM:** So you're it. This is your day.

**EP:** Yeah. Well, that day, there was a bunch of kids got baptized that day, but they only baptize one person at a time.

**JM:** Did you dunk all the way?

**EP:** Oh, yeah.

**JM:** Was it cold?

**EP:** Yeah, I think so. I don't remember it too much, because it was in the spring.

**JM:** It didn't matter. So did you feel changed?

**EP:** Yeah, a little bit. I call it two experiences with that. I remember that one very well, and I remember committing to read the Word, and then my maternal grandmother was very influential in my life as well, and she was very religious too. Both of them actually. I have religious families on both sides, but my grandmother, my maternal grandmother, spent the most time with me.

As I told you, when my mother passed, that was the beginning of a lot of stuff going on. After she passed and my grandfather passed, her father, and then my grandmother passed, which was my father's mother, so she's gone too, but now my grandmother, my mother's mother, is there, and she's mentoring me all these years, and then she was also kind of instructing us as well when we got baptized.

She says to me one time, she says, "God's going to take you out of that dead church." I was going to this church, and it was like a traditional church, and so she had seen that I was sincere and reading my Word and doing all this and the other, and so she made those kind of statements to me, and then I'm like, "I don't want to leave." That's what I figured. I'm happy right here doing my little going to my church that I was going to.

**JM:** What was the name of your church?

**EP:** The church that we grew up in was Christian Tabernacle, and after that one I went to Bethany Baptist Church, and that's where I guess she figured that it was like a dead church. We

had choirs and all that good stuff, and a lot of the kids that I went to school with went there as well, but they didn't teach full gospel like she was used to.

**JM:** So did she ever get her way?

**EP:** Yeah, uh-huh. I had an awakening a day or a year. I came to a crossroads in my life, and I was going to my church, and then I was very active. I was on a lot of things in there, but the preacher, when I was reading, like I said, my Word, I would see things in there, and he would be teaching things, and I'm like, this doesn't quite line up. I couldn't see that what he was teaching was quite the same thing as what I was reading. So, I asked him about it, so it was about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and for us he was teaching us that when a person's baptized, they receive the baptism of the Holy Ghost, and the Word that I was reading said it was a separate experience, and I had to myself think, now he's the pastor of this church, so I'm not going to persuade him to think any different than what I know, or different that he thinks.

I said, "I guess I'd better go where they teach the Word like I understand it to be," so that's where I went and left, and I kind of followed her to where she was going, and that leads me to where my husband was, basically. She was going to the revival meetings where they were very jubilant. They were teaching about the Holy Spirit, and you see all these things going on. I found out it was real, and I was happier going there, and so I had to make a decision. If I'm going to stay there, I would probably be in a traditional, going-through-the-motions kind of situation, but I decided that I'm going to go with these people that I felt like were doing things more scripturally sound to what I understood.

**JM:** And then?



**EP:** And then, well, I left.

**JM:** Meanwhile, we'll get there, so we'll build up to that, but, meanwhile, you're finished high school by now?

**EP:** Oh, yeah.

**JM:** So what are you doing with your time? How do you spend your time after high school?

**EP:** I'm working. I had the hardest time getting work. Oh, my goodness, because I was trying to get to college, and I couldn't even get a job. I'm like, whoa, this is rough, and the reason I had a hard time was I was 17 when I graduated high school, and you had to be 18, or you've got to have a worker's permit or something, so I'm trying to get a job anywhere but the hospital. I didn't like hospitals. I don't like needles.

**JM:** You knew that.

**EP:** No, I wouldn't be looking for a job in a hospital, no. But anyway, I looked and I looked, so I ended up at this place called—I had a couple of jobs, a laundry place, and then I got a job at the Colonial Tearoom, and that's the little restaurant. It wasn't a little restaurant. It was in the big Lazarus store actually; \$1.24 an hour. Can you imagine that? Maybe it was \$1.15, but it was little.

**JM:** What did you do?

**EP:** I was working on the steam table, they call it, steam table, serve. The waitresses come over. She was the waitress, and she'll say, "I need a BLT and a chicken dinner," so we'd put all the

fixins' on the plate, put it up on a counter, the prepared dish. That's our steam table, whatever's on there, so I worked the whole thing, and then sometime I'd have to be in the dish room, and that's when I saw this young man, my husband. I think they hired him after school in the kitchen area, as I call it, so that was interesting. That was a very segregated kind of place. You know what I mean?

You didn't hardly find black waitresses there, but there was one or two of them, and they strategically placed them. If you're really light-complected, you might be out there; not too many of the darker ones were there. They were back there with me at the steam table serving the food. That was it. That was the reality of the times we were living in.

**JM:** Did you wish to be out front? Did you wish for that?

**EP:** No, I did not, uh-uh. I didn't want to be out there myself.

**JM:** So this segregation that you talk about, was it stated? Was it something you knew, or was it something that was said?

**EP:** It was incognito. You didn't know it, because I was kind of told afterwards. Opal, one of the ladies, was out there. She did the ice cream counter, and then my other workers, it seemed like we were all black in that kitchen, come to find out, if I think about it. They called me Little Bitty. I was much smaller then. When I came in there, it was almost like stay in your lane. All the cooks almost were black, except for one.

**JM:** It sounds like a big place.

**EP:** It was. It was huge. They had six floors in Lazarus.

**JM:** So it was the department store.

**EP:** Yeah.

**JM:** And this was one of the restaurants in it.

**EP:** Yeah, one of them, and they had almost a restaurant on every floor, but ours was the Colonial Tearoom. We were on the first floor. Stay in your lane.

**JM:** And the clientele was white mostly?

**EP:** Mostly, mostly white, but all people went there. Wasn't hardly anybody eating in the restaurants. It was the other people, so to speak, but we did our work, got our paychecks. What was interesting with me in meeting my husband was, or I should say Charles, that I was so enthusiastic about going to church. This thing, I got so inspired by going to these revivals that I said, "Oh, I've got to work late tonight until 7:00," and we had buses running all the time, day and night, in Columbus. It's a big city.

So I figured, oh, my grandmother's going to be there too. She'd be on time. My father would bring her, because she didn't drive, so I said, "Okay, Dad brought her there. I'm not going to ask Daddy to bring me. I'm going to catch the bus, get off at Livingston Avenue, and go to church, because the bus will come right across the street from where that is." So I would get off my job, catch the Livingston Street bus, because it was right there on High Street. High Street had all those buses.

We have a central location where all the buses that are going all over the city would come, and that's the downtown area, and you would catch whatever bus you needed to catch and get a

transfer if it was something going other ways. So I did that. The buses were so crowded. I guess I was getting out the front part of the bus, and I noticed a couple of people getting off the back part of the bus, and I'm thinking, what? When I got to church, I said, "That looks like that fellow that works with me up there." I said, "He must have got on the same bus." I didn't know it, because there was a lot of people on there, but he was getting off the same bus; had the same thing on his mind. He's going to church too.

**JM:** So when did you actually meet him?

**EP:** It was there. It was at my job actually. I never knew him before that.

**JM:** And did you talk when you were at work, or how did you begin to—

**EP:** A little bit; not much. I'm like, whoa, I was so interested, and I'm thinking, somebody else got church on their mind after working all day long. I couldn't believe it, so I didn't think too many people thought like I did.

**JM:** So were you suddenly more interested in him?

**EP:** Yeah, piqued my interest, because that was one of the things, when I was in political science in high school, we had to write a paper of people, what you thought, or who you would pick to be your mate or whatever, or who you would date, and I said I wanted a dedicated Christian person, one that doesn't smoke, doesn't drink and all these crazy lifestyles, and my teacher gave me a C. He says, "You've got to be realistic. You can't be unrealistic. You won't get nobody like that." I'm like, oh, okay. So I always thought about that, and then I still held that in my heart. I

wanted somebody that was dedicated and loved God just as much as I love Him, so I didn't even know if I could find anybody like that.

**JM:** But when he stepped off the bus, you thought, well, there's a chance.

**EP:** I didn't think that. When he was in the church, I thought, oh, my God, that's that same fellow.

**JM:** We're rushing ahead.

**EP:** Yeah, we are rushing.

**JM:** So what happened? So he was going to the same church that you were going to.

**EP:** He certainly was.

**JM:** And you were working hard.

**EP:** Yeah.

**JM:** And going to church.

**EP:** Uh-huh.

**JM:** And did you start talking to him at church?

**EP:** Yeah, after church, because he was very diligent. To me, he could care less. He wasn't interested in dating nobody. That's the feeling I got.

**JM:** Busy.

**EP:** He was helping the pastor. That's what his job was. The pastor happened to be a person that was in a wheelchair, and I'm like, wow, and I saw him shoving that brother down. For a Christian, he was rolling him down like he was on a racetrack. He pushed him down there. I'm like, whoa. He didn't seem to mind. He was very good and comfortable, but I thought, well, that is very caring of him. I thought that spoke to me like, oh, my, he must be a very caring person. He takes up time with this man. He's not really well like most people are. There's something to me about that. That's very interesting; not trying to date nobody still. So anyway, after that, then I would see him at times at my job. I really started to look. Oh, my, so introduced me, told me his name and everything like that.

**JM:** So he had these points in his favor, and you were just noticing.

**EP:** Oh, yeah. I said, that sounds like a decent young person, take care of somebody, and work in the church too, just not sitting there. It was good to me.

**JM:** So now were you the only member of your family besides your grandmother who was going to this church?

**EP:** Uh-uh.

**JM:** Oh, your father was also going, at this point.

**EP:** No. Unfortunately, Dad, he drove her there. He drove my cousins there, because, at this time, my grandmother was caring for my aunt's, about three of her kids, and one of the cousins was older than me. A couple of them were younger than I was, and they would always be there, and, of course, Grandma got married again, and he was older too. He didn't drive either; took all

them there, and my sister and my younger brothers. I had two younger brothers. How did we fit in that car? I don't know.

**JM:** I know. Exactly. You were little. You were all small.

**EP:** We were teenagers, at that time. We were smaller.

**JM:** So how did you actually end up meeting your husband? Did this happen during that period of time?

**EP:** Yes, it did, when we went to services, and between him working at the tearoom, because it was busy. You didn't have hardly time to do nothing when you were working. Hey, hi, bye and whatever, so after services, he would stop by and socialize while we were waiting for our ride to come, and he'd see us back in the lobby and talking and all of that. Then his sisters were there, I guess. I don't know who got who to go where, but he's got five sisters. Let me see, was about four of them still in Columbus, at that time. The older sister had gotten married and moved out, and all the other four girls were there, so I started noticing that he was hanging around them, and then I was trying to get close to them to see what they were like.

But he stopped and talked with us young ladies, and he had books to share with us, some thing he thought would help our spiritual walk, and I thought, well, I was special. He'd given me just the book, but no, he gave it to all the girls. He was an evangelist. He was sharing this good information with everybody around. I'm like, oh, okay. But as I continued to go there, I'm like, well, I was about to give up on him. I'm like, forget it, but he sat down beside me one day before one of the services, and I'm like, wow, and I got asked out to ice cream, something like that, after about six months.

I did admire this about him. He said the reason he wouldn't date a lot—now that's one thing, I didn't see him asking people out to go dating, this one or that one or the other one—he said he valued his ministry more than just socially, social life, and he didn't want nobody to mess his ministry up. That really was sincere about serving God, and I'm like, whoa. I had to treasure that as well, so I said, boy, he's really lining up to my expectations. You know what I'm thinking of, so basically we went on a date from there, and we were basically dating from then.

**JM:** So you could go back to that teacher, that political science teacher.

**EP:** Tell him something, huh. Oh, my God. I don't know if he would have appreciated it or not. I don't know.

**JM:** So you dated for a while.

**EP:** Yeah.

**JM:** And you continued to see each other at work.

**EP:** Well, he didn't work too much longer at the place where we were, and he moved on to the veterinary. You're talking about prejudice. He was accused of taking a soda or something, and it was really crazy, because we had these Caucasian boys, I should say it like that, and there were two of them. I remember them too, and the guys that were working, they really didn't need to work. They were rich. They told me they were rich guys.

Some of them were pranksters, like fun-loving, getting into trouble, and so I was told that Miss Hart, who was our boss, had a meeting and said, "There are some things missing," and she called them down there, and those guys, my husband was in the mix of that group, so she



said, “Someone took something, and I don’t want this to happen again,” and so the two Caucasian boys, they walked off, and then she said, “And you, Charlie, I know you did it, and I’m going to be docking your pay.” I’m like, oh, I think some dish broke or something. She’s going to take it out of his salary.

My husband told me when they got to the locker room, I’ll call him Bill, because I don’t remember his name, “I can’t believe that she told you that you did that, because we did it, but she accused you, huh?” They didn’t make it right either. They just let him take the blame for it, get his pay docked, but he decided that day that he wasn’t going back, so he quit that job, and then he started working for the veterinary, so that was a whole new area, which led him into a lot of other, better things, I think. So that stuff happens.

**JM:** It’s one of those memories that you just don’t forget.

**EP:** So he was there long enough for me to catch my eye, that’s all.

**JM:** So after he went to the veterinary, you still saw him at church.

**EP:** Yeah, to stay connected, because service, that was the main thing.

**JM:** And your own experience of the church, how would you describe it? How often did you go, and what was it like?

**EP:** Well, like I said, my family, both sides of my family, were very committed people in church. I have some wonderful aunts—I call them wonderful aunts—and my grandmother and my paternal grandmother, they grew up in West Virginia. I call them hillbillies, because I think that’s what they are.

**JM:** I think certain places call themselves hillbillies.

**EP:** So I have two aunts. One of them is 105, and one of them is 97 this year, and I think that's so admirable. She was talking to me about their life and growing up and her church experience, and the experience that she related to me that I thought was so phenomenal is the time she said, "My grandmother had heart problems, and she was near Huntington." I don't know if you know that name or not, Huntington, West Virginia.

So she was saying that they had taken to the hospital, and, mind you, West Virginia had a lot of hills and all this, and, at that time, they took her down there, and, of course, people a lot of times don't have a lot of means, and they were farming, so forth and so on, so the doctor says to her that, "Your mother, she's not well, and she probably won't last the night, and I think for your family, you need to take her home, let her be, let her spend her days out at home around her family instead of sitting up in this hospital making up a great big old bill."

So they said, well, they had gathered my grandmother up, take her home, and what they did was they called their pastor, and they said when the pastor came, he called some other pastors in, and they line up all around her bed. They had a prayer meeting, and they said Grandma then got up from that bed, and they determined from then on she got well. She got well enough, and they said, "We're getting out of here," and they're going to go somewhere she didn't have to go up all them hills and all those mountains and stuff, and they went to Ohio. Now that's basically why our family is in Ohio now is because they left Huntington area and went to Ohio, and so she's like a pillar in the church in Columbus, Ohio.

My mother's family, we had a lot of people that were committed to going to church there. I was born in church. All I know, I woke up, I haven't been out of the church. I never left. I can remember my earliest days. That's all I know, church, when I was a kid. I had an aunt that was a minister too, and they had a lot of respect for her. They appreciated her ministry, and we believed in praying for sick people. I remember being sick, and I said, "Oh, Lord, they're going to call on Nellie."

They called on Nellie. I was burning up with fever. I remember my father coming in and putting his hand on my head, and my head was on fire, and then next thing I know, I heard those dialing phones. Every time he'd dial a number, it would go back. Oh, Jesus, he's calling Aunt Nellie up. So, sure enough, he called her up. "Judy's up here. She's sick." They called me Judy, my middle name, see, and so next thing I know, Aunt Nellie was on the job praying for me on the phone, and the next morning when I was getting ready to go to school, I remember my father, I felt I was all right. I don't know why, but my fever was gone, and I got up and went on to school. Shucks.

**JM:** Your own aunt.

**EP:** Yeah, my aunt.

**JM:** Nellie. So was this unusual to have a woman pastor, or no?

**EP:** There wasn't very many of them, and they were kind of looked down on in our city. We had a big city, Columbus. Men pastors were a norm.

**JM:** I think pretty much everywhere until kind of recently, right?

**EP:** Right. She was, and the family really respected her, and I guess her prayer life was a cap on it.

**JM:** What was her name, Nellie?

**EP:** Nellie Haddon. She was my grandfather's sister, so that was my mother's aunt.

**JM:** So we're going to fast-forward a little bit, because we've got to find out how this happened. So you had your dates, and then, at some point, somebody made a decision.

**EP:** Yeah. We were invited to a church on Sunday, and I said, wow, this year, Valentine's Day, I said, this will be 50 years my husband proposed to me, 50 years ago, and it was on Valentine's Day that he gave me a proposal, and I had this big box of chocolates, and on this box of chocolates, it had a little girl with a wedding dress on. Well, sweet it was, right? I guess it might be an antique doll now, because her eyes open and shut. I said, "Wow." I kept that little doll. I still have it at home, and that's my hallmark date that he had proposed to me to marry him. I guess about a year-and-a-half later, we did get married, March 16, 1969.

**JM:** You were living in Columbus, at the time.

**EP:** Yes. We both were.

**JM:** You both were, and pretty soon you would start actually moving around, right?

**EP:** Yeah. Well, actually, I didn't really want to marry a pastor. I didn't think I did, but my husband was ministering. When he was in the church, he was the youth minister, and basically he was a nice guy. He was very faithful, and he didn't have a problem working and doing

whatever, and he was going to college and all that, a full plate. So when he ministered, he'd always ask us to go, so we would go to support his services where he was preaching at, and when he would go, the pastor would be there, and then the pastor had friends. They would ask him to come and do a service for them.

Every week it was like we were going someplace different, and it was basically because his ministry was so popular, and what he had to say was so interesting that he was being asked to come and go different places, and we were all over the city of Columbus. It started there, and he would be doing youth services at the Christ Cathedral, and then he would go to another church maybe on the south end, and then he said, well, so and so wants me to come over maybe on the north end. The city's 2 million people in Columbus. It's a large place.

The one pastor was coming to the Christ Cathedral was from Delaware, Ohio, so Delaware's about 30, 40 miles outside Columbus, so it started like that, and then there was Steubenville, Ohio. It was like an hour, two hours away, and then it was Detroit, Michigan, and it got a little bit longer, and then there was Mansfield, Ohio, and then we ended up moving to Mansfield. So it was just a progressive thing, something that we didn't really plan, and to me it was a realization.

So we got married, he was doing revivals maybe or meetings on Friday nights, and maybe Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and if it was a longer place, we'd be there Friday night until Sunday morning; come back, we'd have to go to work, both of us. We were working and doing ministry, and it got to be, oh, we've got to do one thing or the other, but we still tried to hang on to our jobs and do ministry as well. Then our family started coming. My daughter, Lisa, was born, and we were in Mansfield, Ohio, I remember. That was one of our first places that we were at, and the pastor, enjoyed him preaching so much that he asked him to do a revival there. That was

Monday through Friday. It might have started on Sunday, and then told everybody, "Let's go back. Let's come back on maybe Monday or Tuesday night, and we'll finish it up on Friday."

So for me, I couldn't be there through all the days, and then work, so I would come up on Friday, and then stay maybe over the weekend. My husband was still working too some of the times over there, and his job was at Battelle Memorial Institute, at that time, and it was wearing on us. Can you imagine traveling, and then trying to hold down an eight-hour job? He says, "Well, when they lay me off here," they were laying people off. They called him in there to say, "Okay, well, this is it."

When he got in there, they offered him a raise and a promotion. I said, "Oh, my God," so he had to actually make a decision that I'm going to choose this or the other, and he realized that God was calling him into full-time ministry to do revivals, and that's when we decided that he was going to be a full-time traveling evangelist, and I was in agreement with it, because I could see, and I did appreciate it, being that I was able to go with him to so many of the services he was in. I had a good appreciation of what he was doing, and it would seem like robbery to keep him, no, we're going to do this. You've got to come home, be home for your family.

We had a little tay-tay [ph] with his mother. One time she would say, "You've done that long enough." They were pulling him back, but me and him, we were in agreement: this is what we need to do, and he did. He went and did that. It led from there. So many doors had been opened, so much ministry. I mean, it's just amazing to me, because I was a homebody. I wasn't really a person that liked traveling. I didn't look at that like, oh, I get to go here, I get to go there.

**JM:** So, for example, the first time that you both went together somewhere, where was that, do you remember, or one of the first times after he had made the decision that this was his life? How did that sort of change? What did it look like for you?

**EP:** Well, like I say, we were doing a lot of things on the weekends, and it meshed into the full-time, and it was exciting for me. I've seen so many things in the Word. He has a very dynamic way of presenting the gospel, and it was just like people saying they received that Word, and they were so happy to have him come and to share with them.

I think one of the areas I remember was Cincinnati, Ohio, and the other one was Detroit, Michigan. That was what I call megachurch. At the time, they had about 800 people there. That was a lot to me, so I'll say Detroit, they had a ministry for the elderly mothers, and they also kept their guest evangelists there. That meant me, my husband, my little baby girl. I was just getting to the place where I would play music. In that way, I'd accompany; I could contribute to his ministry that way.

So I found out I'm going to have to strategize this, because I'm a little nervous. I see all these people coming in. I'm like, oh, I got there early. I got a front-row seat. I said I want to be closer. That way I don't have to walk down too far, so I was close to the front, and there were so many people who came in there. I was very, very nervous, and my husband, he wanted me to play for him when he sang, because that's part of his intro when he starts ministering. He would sing a song or something, and he would have me come in there, because I knew him, and I knew what key he sang in and all that stuff.

I said to myself, “Why, these people have got plenty of people to do their music.” They had good drummers and all that stuff. He had a real lively service. I got very nervous, and, sure enough, he called me up there, and I was holding my little baby like I’ve got to take care of her. Don’t call me. Somebody grabbed my child, took that excuse away. I was up there. I just was so nervous, I couldn’t hardly see those keys. I was looking at the white keys, and I’m like I don’t know whether they’re white or black. They’re kind of meshed together. Oh, boy, but I got over that.

The pastor, now this happened to be a woman pastor, there, she said, “Were you nervous up there, preacher?” I said, “I know he wasn’t.” She said, “No, I wasn’t nervous.” I said, “He wasn’t, but I was.”

**JM:** But you got through it.

**EP:** Oh, yeah.

**JM:** Did you start enjoying it in a certain way?

**EP:** Yeah, I did. I enjoyed it. I liked to see people receive from the message, and he used to pray for people when they were having problems and so forth, and they seemed to be getting better after he prayed for them and things like that. It was very awesome.

**JM:** So what kind of music did you contribute?

**EP:** Very lively.

**JM:** What was the music? Can you remember any of them, because you probably still have some in your repertoire, right?



**EP:** Oh, yeah.

**JM:** So what's a favorite?

**EP:** Oh, boy, let me see. Some of those song, he'd say, "Who am I that a king would lead and die for? Who am I that he would say not my will thine Lord."

**JM:** Wow, you have a nice voice. Are you an alto?

**EP:** I think so.

**JM:** It's beautiful. You have a beautiful voice.

**EP:** Thank you. He says, "The answer I'll never know, but why he ever loved me so," that was that one, and that was one of those songs. We had that. We had quite a few, and then we had our children. After, they started coming.

**JM:** That's right. So you had Lisa, and then next was?

**EP:** Tanya.

**JM:** And then?

**EP:** Well, Lisa and Tanya we got to travel with most, because they were little, and we went all the way down as far as Florida. That was interesting. Oh, my God. Those two little babies, and people were very accommodating, and I always thought, Lord, did he really want me on this trip in this position? Make a provision for it. I don't want to feel like I'm in somebody's way or

taking up space I don't need to take up, so whenever we needed one bed, we had the one bed for just us and the little one.

When we needed two beds for the two little girls and ourselves, God had a way of providing for us, even when we were down in Florida, Georgia. Oh, boy, so that was to me a confirmation. It made me feel like, okay, this is God's will for us to do this and provide for us, so I could see that God was working it out, providing, and we were part of the work, and the little girls grew up.

When we ended up getting the third little girl, we were making a transition from Columbus. Now I told you we were there, and so we met a pastor in Mansfield, Ohio, which is 60 miles north of Columbus, and they needed a musician, so now my little girls are getting older. They're two years apart, so Lisa was maybe four, Tanya's two, and now I'm expecting Terry. That's my third daughter.

Now Lisa will be going to preschool and kindergarten, so it's God preparing you for every step of the way, and I'm seeing these transitions. When we were there together on the road, it was good. Everything worked out. When I needed to settle in an area, God worked that out, and so the pastor there needed a musician, and I did that position while my husband continued to travel, and I would still go out maybe on the weekends when he would go places, some days that he would be traveling.

So then we had our Terry. I was living in Mansfield, but I had her in Columbus, because I started my prenatal there, so I ended up having her in Columbus, but I was living in

Mansfield, and a year-and-a-half later, our son was born in Mansfield, so there we go. There's four.

**JM:** And when did they start actually becoming part of the team? So your four children, you have the four, you're in Mansfield, and you have this job too. You're doing the music, and your husband's traveling, and sometimes you're traveling.

**EP:** The children would fill in. We had another church in Detroit we went to. Basically, like I said, in the state of Ohio, those places were close by, and we could take everybody with us when we went there, and when they were there, they would sing their little songs.

**JM:** So they became part of it pretty early.

**EP:** Yeah. I wish I could share with you some photos.

**JM:** So there was a time, were you in Delaware? Then you came up to Springfield. When was that? When did you actually settle? Where did you go after Mansfield?

**EP:** Well, actually, Mansfield was our first place that we settled. We went from Columbus to Mansfield. Mansfield, we were there for about seven years, and that transition, the pastor passed away, and my husband was making the decision, at that time, was to stay there or move on, and it was at that time he was traveling up to New Haven, Connecticut. That was an awesome experience there. It was something else.

**JM:** What was awesome about it?

**EP:** He always calls me when he gets to his appointments, and he went to New Haven, Connecticut where he was supposed to be, so he goes to New Haven, he calls back and he says, “Oh, something happened in the service this morning. The pastor tells me that the assistant pastor died in the service.” Oh, God. I said, “That’s not good. This is awful. He’s supposed to be starting revival. What are they going to do? Are you going to come home?” “No,” he said, “the family wants to have revival.” I said, “Oh, my goodness. I can’t believe this.” That was the assistant pastor that passed, a man, and then the pastor himself, he says his wife was ill. Two days later she dies. I’m like, “Charles.”

**JM:** You’d better get out of there.

**EP:** I said, “Oh, my God.” I said, “I can’t believe this. Are you serious?”

**JM:** Difficult.

**EP:** We have never had anything like that happen, ever, so he said, “But the people were so hungry. They needed to hear a word from God in that church. Their hearts were broken,” and I’m like, “Oh, my Lord, I can’t believe you went and had to do that.” So he did. Well, just that spring-boarded to him coming back to that area, and when he was there, I think after that, we had a friend in Columbus that had a brother in Springfield, Massachusetts. That’s when that took place, and when he went there, I think he invited him to come to his church for a service.

I think you remember his speaking about the bishop of that Massachusetts, I’m saying the Church of God and Christ bishop, was in town, because of a funeral in that area. I hate to say that, but that’s what had happened, and the bishop said, “I’ve got a church I’d like for you to visit

and maybe speak at on Sunday, and it's in Pittsfield, Massachusetts," and so that's what spring-boarded him to Pittsfield.

He started ministering in that church, and they loved the ministry so much, they kept him that whole week, and he called him back. He said, "What do you think about moving to Pittsfield?" I'm like, "Where is it?" I had to go get a map to find out, and he said, "I think it's near Albany, New York or something," and here I'm still in Mansfield, Ohio. I'm like, "Oh, really? Do whatever you think you want to do."

So I told my girls. I took my girls out to lunch, my little girls. Now they're not big girls, they're little girls, like ten, eight, six, that age, and my baby, Chuckie, was only four-and-a-half, five, almost five years old. I said, "Sure, we'll go," because I'm always traveling anyway. Something new, something different. So we ended up packing it up.

I had a cousin that was an evangelist as well, and he and my husband's sister, they offered to drive us up. "You all going to do something different? Okay, we'll help you get there." So we had two carloads of kids and some adults and drove all the way from Mansfield, Ohio up here to Pittsfield, Massachusetts. I believe it was 1980. It was October 1980, and we met the church family here at Victory. It was called Victory Mission, at that time, and I guess the rest is history.

**JM:** Did you think it would be so long? When you moved here, did you think, oh, this is going to be my home, or did you think it might be another temporary?

**EP:** I guess I thought, well, I don't know. I really didn't know.

**JM:** You weren't thinking like that.

**EP:** Not really. I didn't know exactly how long, even when we were here for a while. Sometimes you do something for a season, and then you might move on, and we continued to be here and the work progressed. It's kind of like you get involved with the people and the town and the situation. It kind of grows on you.

**JM:** So what was your role at the beginning in this ministry? Your husband has a church, and that's kind of new, right?

**EP:** Yeah, uh-huh.

**JM:** So you're suddenly in a different role too.

**EP:** A little bit, yeah. What I was prepared to do, I always like to step back and find out what people are doing. I'm not here to, you know, you get over there, I'm here now. I wasn't that type of person, I don't think, and I knew I was in music. I did music, and they did not have a musician, so I was, wait a minute, there was a lady there that played music, but she was a little amateurish, but they needed somebody more professional, and I think I provided that for them, and I was glad to do it. At this time, I'm comfortable in doing music, so I gladly stepped into that role, just gradually picked up other things.

**JM:** So this was what year?

**EP:** 1980. We moved officially December '80 into Pittsfield.

**JM:** And so your children basically went to high school?

**EP:** To middle school, high school. All of the last three were finished up at Conte, which was called West Side, at the time. Can you imagine how long ago that was? West Side Community School, and then it turned to Conte Community School, and Crosby was a middle school, at the time. My oldest daughter was the last graduating class that was going there, and she went from there to Taconic.

**JM:** So what's it like to be the minister's wife? You have your own job. You do the music, and what else is the job? What is the job?

**EP:** Well, I guess you get along with, kind of the liaison, working with the women and the members at the church. I appreciate their roles and so forth, and fitting in basically. The other thing that I do is I bake. We were doing fundraisers. I'm going to go back, way back. When I was a teenager, and I was telling you I was in the church in Columbus, in the Bethany Baptist Church, our youth group, we had a lot of people, a lot of kids. And so they wanted us to do a fundraiser for that group, and so they mentioned they brainstormed. Oh, we're going to do a carwash. We're going to do this, that, and the other.

I said, "Well, what about a bake sale?" "Okay, you do a bake sale. Anybody suggests it, they've got to spearhead it." I'm like, oh, God. So I said, "Oh, my goodness." I'm only about 14 years old, 15. I'm in this youth group of 30 or 40, 50 kids, and I'm supposed to spearhead this thing, and I don't know who to ask, and I'm like, jeez, I've got some good bakers in my family. I'm going to ask my grandmother. She's going to bake for me. I'll ask my aunts. Oh, my goodness.

Sure enough, they rallied behind me. They gave me some good stuff. I was selling stuff, and I had my bake sale, and they had the reports out. They always had this book. They did

all the, you know, how much did we make from the carwash? All right, and they said, oh, we made so and so. How much did we make from this? How much did we make from the bake sale? My bake sale had made more than all of them. I couldn't believe it, but mine was the most successful.

**JM:** Well, that was exciting.

**EP:** I'm like, what did you all do? I didn't know, and I didn't get much help from them folks. I had to rely on my family to do that for me, but they backed me up, and we put on a good bake sale. Little did I know that it was going to help me later on.

**JM:** So you learned how to bake.

**EP:** Yeah. My grandmother, you remember I told you, she had me taking lessons every week.

**JM:** So what did you bake? What's your thing?

**EP:** So now here I am in Pittsfield and, like you said, working with my church group. They were doing sales here, and I'm like, I can do something. What do you all need? I'll do what you ever need, and maybe I can make a cake or a pie, and my grandmother taught me how to bake pies. She was very good. Basically, that Colonial Tearoom, basically I don't know if it was that one or not, but she used to bake. She was a chief baker for Lazarus store back in the day, and so she had quite a history doing what she did.

So she taught me how to do it. She gave me a recipe to make this crust and all that. My husband as a pastor, he was saying, "Okay, you all are having these sales. Now how much do you want to make?" It's not about just putting something out on a table and just seeing what comes in, and I



think it was Adams Supermarket at the time we came here. That's way back. It was Adams Supermarket, and they allowed people inside the store to sell, so that was nice.

So they would come, and they would make maybe \$30, and they said, "We would like to make \$100." He said, "Well, one thing about making \$100, you've got to have \$100 worth of product to make \$100, so you can't come out here with a dozen cupcakes."

**JM:** That's great, a little business injected into this endeavor.

**EP:** Exactly. So I was trying to help them. I said, "Okay, so you all are doing cupcakes and stuff. I can do some pies." I do a sweet potato pie that's very good. I do apple pies. I do all of them actually, and I found out through the Berkshires that they like strawberry-rhubarb, so I had to learn how to make that, so I was adapting to my surroundings here, trying to make myself accommodate what people liked. So I did those, and I did my cakes, so my grandmother prepared me.

**JM:** So you have some real skills, some real skills that you can make a living with.

**EP:** I see.

**JM:** That's pretty nice. So we're back in Pittsfield, and so you brought that gift with you too, so the baking and the music and your little children. You had quite a life.

**EP:** I guess so.

**JM:** You have a very full, sort of really a team.

**EP:** Right. That's what I like to think of it. I also should mention that I do sew.

**JM:** You mentioned sewing, learned from that woman in the school.

**EP:** I did, and it was very advantageous that I learned that, and my family, my aunts, they just hooked me, they hooked me up. One of my aunt's name was Aunt Christine, and when I was a child she made me and my sister an outfit. My mother's passing, she's going to try to do something, and I was like, wow, she made this outfit for us. How sweet it was. So when I started sewing, they just made over it, like, "Oh, you did that? Oh, that's so nice," and I was eating it up, so I'm going back there and I'm doing more stuff. Okay, I'm going to show you something else.

Because I had learned to do things and do them well, and because they had praised me so much for doing them, I continued to try to just make them happy. So I learned how to sew suits. I can sew something like I have now, or my husband, he said he'd like some suits, so I learned how to make men's suits.

**JM:** That's pretty serious.

**EP:** Then he started like, "Oh, can you put a zipper inside and customize?" challenging my skills, so he really, really pressed the buttons there. It was just something else. I sewed for him. I sewed for other people, and my dad, I made him a suit. My children, when we went to different areas, I made their little dresses. They were all dressed alike, and my son, sometimes I'd make him and his dad the suit the same, things like that.

**JM:** Sweet. Lucky family. Do any of your daughters or son know how to sew, any of them?

**EP:** I wish they could. I tried to teach them.

**JM:** They weren't interested.

**EP:** No, I guess not. You know what they did? I don't know why, but my children were graduating from high school, going to their proms. "Ma, can you make my prom dress?" Oh, yeah, I made their dresses, and when they all got married, all my little girls, I made each one of them their bridal dresses. That was my gift to you. That's what I told them.

**JM:** That's so amazing.

**EP:** So my son, I couldn't leave him out. I made his little tuxedo suit too, so that was my gift to them. My treasure.

**JM:** And so are they having children yet?

**EP:** Oh, yes. I should get my photo album out. Lisa had our first granddaughter. I call them the 20/20 Club, because my husband was 20 when she was born, and when she was 20 she had her child, and there they are. I know their ages by him, 20/20. So right now we have a total of 13 grandchildren.

**JM:** And most of them are nearby.

**EP:** Yes, they mostly are.

**JM:** Because you have three children who live sort of near?

**EP:** Yeah, in this area.

**JM:** I know some of these things from your husband just recently. I don't want to not ask you, so let's make sure we know where your children are. So, Lisa is?

**EP:** She's in Springfield, and she teaches Spanish in Hartford, Connecticut now, and she's married to Dominic, and I guess he's got a dual profession. He was a chemical engineer, but he chose to teach school in the Christian Academy their children are going to. Tanya's our second daughter, and she's in the Reading, Pennsylvania area. She's married to a young man named Danny Gilmore, which the Gilmores are well-known over there, very strong. They have two children, and her daughter is, I think, 21 now, and her son is 16. They're about to go out of the house. Lisa, I should say, has three daughters, has three girls, and then my third daughter is Terry, and she lives in Longmeadow, works in the Springfield area.

**JM:** Is she also in education?

**EP:** Yeah. She's a principal actually in the Springfield school system. I forgot the name of her school, and her husband is Maurice, and he grew up, spent the last of his high school years here, and he's now practicing law there. Last but not least, our son, we call him Chuckie, but he's Charles E. Pratt, III, and he lives in basically Lanesborough, and he's married to Sara. Sara and him, Chuckie's doing architecture work, and Sara is managing. She's going to be doing a store managing position here in Pittsfield, and they have five, they do. He's got Charles, IV as part of their household and three others. There's four boys all together, and one little girl, Maria.

**JM:** This is a family that likes children.

**EP:** Yeah, I really appreciate that, and they all are musically-inclined, and I have to appreciate that. Andrea sings. That's one of the granddaughters. Nadia and Angelique play the piano. Tanya's daughter sings. Isaiah, I'm not sure about him. Elise, Terry's daughter, two of the daughters, they sing, they play multiple instruments. I can't tell you what they are, the trumpet,

the trombone and whatever. Maurice, he was playing the cello, oh, my goodness, but he loves singing, at this moment. Chuck's got all of his boys. One of his boys is playing the keyboard, and the other one's doing the bass, Charles, IV, which they call him B.C., so I'm happy with them, very happy they decided.

**JM:** They're pretty close, except for Reading, Pennsylvania, which isn't so bad.

**EP:** Right, six hours.

**JM:** You can drive there.

**EP:** Yeah, in a day, uh-huh.

**JM:** So now there are two questions that the NAACP wants me to ask everybody, and so the first one is, it's a hard question, what is it like to be an African-American in the Berkshires?

**EP:** It's not bad, I don't think. It's very multicultural here. I don't know. I tend to see people as people, not so much you're different than me and I'm different than you, but I try to get along with people. We try to be inclusive, as you call it. I don't like to be exclusive. You're not in the club, because you don't look like me or whatever, and it seems like this community is very multicultural. You see a lot of mixture in race and so forth, and so I'm used to a lot of that.

**JM:** So it's been pretty comfortable?

**EP:** Yeah, pretty comfortable.

**JM:** I've often wondered in this project, because I'm white, it affects the answer to that question. Do you know what I mean? I don't know. You don't know. You never know when what you are or what you look like affects what you're—right?

**EP:** That's true.

**JM:** Does it make people sort of want to protect me, or not want me to feel bad or whatever? You know what I'm saying?

**EP:** Right.

**JM:** This is another question, and if you want to go more back into that one, we can. The other one is about the first African-American President. So what was it like for you when Barack Obama was elected?

**EP:** It was very good. I would like to cap it with my aunt, who's 105. She said, "I never thought I'd see a day. I never thought I'd see it," and it was kind of unbelievable. I can't believe this has really happened, but it has happened, and it was good. It was like finally we see the culmination of civil rights and earning a place and being treated equal to, okay, now you can see that we have something to offer you, no matter what color we are, and we can be very productive and viable to anyone. So that was really wonderful, I thought.

**JM:** And your children, of course, grandchildren, that will have been normal, in a way for them, right?

**EP:** I think so.

**JM:** Because they were little when it happened, for the most part, except for the 21-year-old.

Well, she was still kind of little too when it happened. For people who are older like us, we can see how that might make a difference in how people see themselves and their options.

**EP:** One thing about it, you're talking about this area and what was good was my daughter, Terry, I guess she was always outgoing. She's a real spunky little girl, and one of her accomplishments in high school was becoming, I think, maybe the first person of color to be voted as the class president, and I thought, well, this is wonderful. This is good, because it wasn't because the majority of the students were black there. They were not, and she had to have been voted in by the white students that were there as well, and well-received, so they voted her in.

Behind that, her husband was going to Taconic as well. He was in the class behind her, that is, and he was also voted in the year following, so I think that spoke to the society that we don't have to be afraid of each other, and you're scared of me, because I look different, so this is the Berkshires, so we're accepting one another, and we're getting along.

One thing I have said to my children as they were growing up is, "Give back. You might gain education, position, whatever, but give back to your community. We'd like for you to share the things that you've accomplished and the good that you've accomplished with those that are behind you and coming up."

**JM:** When we spoke with your husband, he talked about an experience he had coming home from Westfield on Route 20, the background. Have your children had experiences like that where they might have been singled out?

**EP:** My son, you can't see, but he's married a girl that is Caucasian, and we were kind of nervous for him, because that's not accepted everywhere, and I think he might have had some kind of repercussions, because of the relationship, and that's what you always kind of grimace with your children. You figure everybody is not as understanding as we are, and they're not going to like things the way we like them or accept people the way you accept them.

**JM:** So you think that things have happened to him as a result of that?

**EP:** Yeah. I think maybe in Lenox and things like that.

**JM:** People say things?

**EP:** He might have been stopped. He used to work at Tanglewood when they had summer programs there, and he's such a daredevil. He rides bikes and stuff, and maybe he was riding through there and might have gotten stopped, things like that.

**JM:** So because he was a young black man.

**EP:** Uh-huh.

**JM:** So this is the architect, right?

**EP:** Yeah. Chuckie's the youngest, and he's right now about 42.

**JM:** And he's got his own kids.

**EP:** Oh, yeah, all five.

**JM:** That's the five.



**EP:** All five of them, yeah.

**JM:** You've got a lively house. What have we forgotten to ask you?

**EP:** That's it. I don't know.

**JM:** You're having quite an experience. Your life is just so full.

**EP:** I appreciate it.

**JM:** I know we haven't touched on everything. We couldn't possibly, but I hope we at least helped you tell a story. Thank you very much.

**EP:** I wanted to offer what you wanted.

**JM:** Well, this is for the community.

[end]

