Elayne Hunter Washington Oral History Interview

January 21, 2018

Julia Brock 00:09
Okay, so I'll start by saying today's January 21, 2018, and I'm Julia Brock from the University of West Georgia interviewing Elayne Washington Hunter of Antioch, about your memories of the church. So thank you for letting me interview you today. And can we start by the asking when where you were born?

Elayne Hunter Washington 00:30
I was born in Atlanta, Georgia, at Harris Memorial Hospital and the year was 1949.

Julia Brock 00:42
Will you tell me a little bit about your family, starting with your parents. Who were they?

Elayne Hunter Washington 00:49
My parents were Charles and Virginia Washington. And my grandparents were Charles and Virginia Fowler.

Julia Brock 01:03
And those were your mother's [parents]?

Elayne Hunter Washington 01:05
Those were my mother's parents. And my great-grandfather was James Fowler, and he was a founding member of the Antioch Church. So my family has six generations of family here at Antioch.

Julia Brock 01:23
Did you know James Fowler?

Elayne Hunter Washington 01:25
I did not.

Julia Brock 01:27
But Charles Fowler, your grandfather, you grew up with.

Elayne Hunter Washington 01:29
Yes. Yes.

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Julia Brock 01:31
And you have siblings?

Elayne Hunter Washington 01:33
I have one sibling. His name is Calvin Washington.

Julia Brock 01:40
And did you ... well, let me back up. What did your parents do for a living?

Elayne Hunter Washington 01:46
My mom was a beautician and she attended Laboratory High School on Spelman's campus and graduated from there. And then she went on to the Apex Beauty College, and she had a shop in the back of my grandparents' house where she did hair.

Julia Brock 02:14
Was that on White Street?

Elayne Hunter Washington 02:15
It was on White Street.

Julia Brock 02:16
And when I used the term Beacon Hill, is that correct?

Elayne Hunter Washington 02:21
Yes.

Julia Brock 02:21
Where they were living?

Elayne Hunter Washington 02:22
Uh huh.

Julia Brock 02:23
Did y'all did your parents live close to them? Did you grow up close to your grandparent?

Elayne Hunter Washington 02:27
Yes.

Julia Brock 02:27
Where was your house?

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Elayne Hunter Washington 02:29
Well, we actually lived with them for a long time. And then we moved to the Allen Wilson Apartments [in Decatur].

Julia Brock 02:39
Will you ... oh, go ahead.

Elayne Hunter Washington 02:40
My father was a chef.

Julia Brock 02:43
And he specialized in certain kinds of things...

Elayne Hunter Washington 02:47
Well, he was an executive chef, and he specialized in ice carvings and, you know, things of that nature.

Julia Brock 02:58
And he worked if I remember all over the city for the governor and different kinds of big events...

Elayne Hunter Washington 03:03
He did, he did. He was the executive food manager for C&S [Citizens & Southern} Bank at the time and then it became Nation's Bank. That evolved into Bank of America.

Julia Brock 03:20
Do you know how your parents met?

Elayne Hunter Washington 03:24
I understand that my dad courted my mom on a bicycle [laughs]. You know, 'cause they were in the community. They lived in Decatur. And she had a car and he had a bike.

Julia Brock 03:43
That was some fast pedaling. What you remember about growing up on White Street and in Beacon Hill?

Elayne Hunter Washington 03:54
It was a really different kind of community from Atlanta. Because I went to school in Atlanta, and all of the people ... it was like the village concept because all of the people knew everybody and so your parents were all over the place. You know, you couldn't go out the back door or the front door and do anything bad that you didn't get reprimanded for. Because all of the people in the community knew each

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other. Very close-knit. There were many landowners in Decatur and lots of entrepreneurs that I remember.

Julia Brock 04:45
Do you remember some of the businesses?

Elayne Hunter Washington 04:48
Hm-hmm. The people who live next door to us on white Street, the Steele family, owned a cafe that was very popular. It was located near one of our churches, the Thankful Baptist Church. He was famous for what they call the "Tom Steele splits." People went there for splits and it was close to a movie theater that we attended.

Julia Brock 05:13
Was it a banana split?

Elayne Hunter Washington 05:14
No, it was the sausage type split with the red hot thing with the mustard and that kind of stuff.

Julia Brock 05:24
And the movie theater?

Elayne Hunter Washington 05:26
And there was a movie theater down near where his place was. And it was a family-oriented business.

Julia Brock 05:34
And from what I understand, most of that was on Atlanta ... most of that was on Atlanta Avenue?

Elayne Hunter Washington 05:40
Right.

Julia Brock 05:41
Yeah, Thomas Steele's cafe, the Ritz Theater...

Elayne Hunter Washington 05:44
And it was across from the Thankful Baptist Church. And I understood from my mom that during the '30s, my grandfather owned a corner store that was down the street from our church on Marshall Street.

Julia Brock 06:00
Like a general store, maybe?

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Elayne Hunter Washington 06:02
Hm-hmm, during the Depression era.

Julia Brock 06:05
What did you receive from your elders about the history of the church?

Elayne Hunter Washington 06:12
Well, they talked about the history because it was noted that Antioch had a really rich history because it was founded before the other churches, for African Americans. The main thing that I remember hearing was that on Sundays they had to pass out tickets for people to enter the edifice, because the church building was so small that there wasn't enough room for the people who wanted to worship. So that was my fondest memory. I love that now.

Julia Brock 06:53
Do you remember the ... is it Marshall Street ... was it Marshall Street then?

Elayne Hunter Washington 06:59
Uh-huh.

Julia Brock 07:00
Do you remember that building?

Elayne Hunter Washington 07:02
Yes.

Julia Brock 07:03
What do you remember about the place?

Elayne Hunter Washington 07:05
Well, it was ... I remember it being a wooden church. I remember that on the left side of the church to the rear was the church parsonage. That's where our pastors and families lived. I also remember that our building, church building, set behind the government center there. And on Sundays, we would leave church Sunday school and go to a cafe up the street. And we would have ice cream sundaes and milkshakes and things like that. And some of our parishioners lived upstairs on the businesses downstairs. One of the ladies owned a barber shop there, which it wasn't open on Sundays, just the other ... the cafe was open and we'd go there and get candy and sit down and socialize.

Julia Brock 08:18
Do you remember the name of the cafe?

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Elayne Hunter Washington 08:20
I don't. But I know that the building where it was owned by a gentleman at our church that we called Uncle Danny. And we weren't really related to them but we were, you know, the community was close-knit. And so our extended families were people who really weren't family members.

Julia Brock 08:49
How would you describe the congregation in terms of their backgrounds?

Elayne Hunter Washington 08:56
Antioch had a lot of intellectual-type folk who were members of the church. One of the things that I remember was that on Sundays, one of the gentlemen who taught at the high school there, played trumpet with the choir. And so we had the trumpet to accompany the music, you know, was one of the accompanists to the choir singing on Sundays, Mr. Johnson. And he was related to the Brooks family by marriage, and Mr. Brooks was the superintendent of the Sunday school at Antioch.

Julia Brock 09:38
And there was another Brooks, who was an early pastor at the church. Is that the same family?

Elayne Hunter Washington 09:44
Was that Jethro? I think so but I don't know that that's the same family or ....

Julia Brock 09:52
Was the congregation different than for example, folks who went to Thankful or Lily Hill. Were their differences in who attended?

Elayne Hunter Washington 10:02
You know, back then they would claim that Methodist people were a little bit more sophisticated.

Julia Brock 10:11
Maybe middle class.

Elayne Hunter Washington 10:11
Uh-huh. Something like that.

Julia Brock 10:16
What are your earliest memories of the church?

Elayne Hunter Washington 10:21
I mainly remember being at church a lot. I remember that there were meetings and activities in the basement of the church. And I always remember a crowd of people being there and lots of discussions

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about stuff. I can remember ... our past ... the earliest pastor that I remember was Reverend Gay, Ben Gay, and he had a daughter who was close to my age. I think her name was Deborah. And they lived in the parsonage there. So the apartments where we lived, you would cut up the back of the high school, Decatur High School, and then you would pass the parsonage before you get to the church. So it was always easy to stop by there.

Julia Brock 11:24
On a given week, how many times would you be at church?

Elayne Hunter Washington 11:30
About four times, three or four times a week.

Julia Brock 11:32
What would what kinds of things would bring you there?

Elayne Hunter Washington 11:34
Choir rehearsal, YPD [Young Peoples' Department] meetings. Just going to the church for when my mom had meetings, for different clubs and groups that they belonged to.

Julia Brock 11:55
What was she active in, in terms of clubs and groups?

Elayne Hunter Washington 12:00
I don't remember the names of the clubs, but she was pretty active. And they would ... she was also a supervisor for the YPD. But those ... they always had meetings at their homes and they would put out their fine China and, and great recipes, whenever she was servicing her groups from church.

Julia Brock 12:37
So the YPD really is also historic. The YPD was active when you were young, when Ms. Causey was young...

Elayne Hunter Washington 12:45
Right.

Julia Brock 12:45
And now it's still going on.

Elayne Hunter Washington 12:47
It's still going on and it affiliates as a part of the Missionary Society.

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Julia Brock 12:52
Okay. Do you know when it began by any chance?

Elayne Hunter Washington 12:56
Well, with the church. The organization of the church is inclusive of having a young people's division.

Julia Brock 13:07
So, just to focus on that for a minute, what kinds of activities would y'all do as the YPD?

Elayne Hunter Washington 13:16
We would ... we had events like lock-ins. We would have entertainment to come to the church.

Julia Brock 13:36
Like musicians or ...?

Elayne Hunter Washington 13:37
Right. And mainly ... because we were a connected church, we would attend Sunday school conventions in Monticello, Georgia, and Macon and you know, all over the state. The district that we affiliate with is the Sixth Episcopal District and that covers the entire state of Georgia. So we would constantly be going back and forth to the city of Rome and, you know, places like that to YPD events.

Julia Brock 14:14
So when you say connected church, that's what you mean connected to the broader district system of AME church?

Elayne Hunter Washington 14:20
Right, right.

Julia Brock 14:21
What do you remember about the big conventions, like a Sunday school convention in Macon ...?

Elayne Hunter Washington 14:26
We just, you know ... first of all, we were kids. And some of us were ... some of us wanted to hold offices there. So I remember learning Robert's Rules of Order and how to establish protocols and ... but mainly, I remember meeting kids from other cities. And as a young girl in the church, you know, we were interested in boys. So we would find the cute guys, you know, who would be at the conferences and we'd try to talk to them and everything. But that's kind of what we did [laughs].

Julia Brock 15:14
And you were also active in choir. From what age, because you're still active.

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Elayne Hunter Washington 15:19
Right, right. From the time that I was probably about five, six. And our choir was led by the pianist at the time, was A.G.Baker.

Julia Brock 15:33
That was in the '50s?

Elayne Hunter Washington 15:35
That was in the '50s. And believe it or not, she was ... well, she was also my cousin. But she played for church across from Morehouse College. And she was instrumental in playing for Gladys Knight back then. And they were pretty well known. The street and Beacon Hill, Chewning Way, is named for her mother. And she was our ... she was probably are great aunt.

Julia Brock 16:14
In thinking about that ... that brings up a good point. What kin went to church with you? So if you think about your family, extended family, who was all involved in Antioch?

Elayne Hunter Washington 16:25
In our family? Well, we had cousins and aunts and uncles and grandparents and great-grandparents.

Julia Brock 16:39
So, did y'all have family at Thankful or Lily Hill or any of the other area churches?

Julia Brock 16:43
So there really was a tight network...

Elayne Hunter Washington 16:43
We had ... we have family at Thankful and my father's mother was a member of Lily Hill. And our Girl Scout troop was at Lily Hill. Also the kindergarten that I attended was at Thankful.

Elayne Hunter Washington 17:12
Right , a network, a community is what it was. And believe it or not there is a senior center, multipurpose center, in Fulton County that's named for my former kindergarten teacher at Thankful.

Julia Brock 17:37
I kind of got us on track. So we were talking about kind of what you would attend in a given week, so YPD, choir. Were there Wednesday evening suppers or evening suppers at all during the week?

Elayne Hunter Washington 17:52

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Wednesday before ... there was a Bible study on Wednesday night.

Julia Brock 18:00
Do you remember anything else about those programs?

Elayne Hunter Washington 18:06
I know that the people loved to cook. And so there was always something going on.

Julia Brock 18:14
Sundays, what time would y'all go to church? What time was the service?

Elayne Hunter Washington 18:17
Well, we would go to Sunday school. And then we would go to church at 11 o'clock.

Julia Brock 18:24
What do you remember about Dr. Gay, Reverend Gay ... you said he was the first pastor you can remember. What do you remember about his preaching style?

Elayne Hunter Washington 18:34
I don't remember a lot about his preaching style. I do remember that there was a huge coronation where his wife was crowned queen. And I was a little girl but there's a picture and I'm actually on the picture. I must have been about five and I remember his being involved with the connectional church. And I think at one point he ran for Bishop of the AME Church. I'm not sure if that he ran while he was pastoring at our church or shortly after he left or not. Oh, and I remember also that his wife had a sister who was one of the ... she was real stylish, and she was one of the first African American teachers to integrate Dekalb County schools.

Julia Brock 19:41
Do you remember his wife's name and her sister's name?

Elayne Hunter Washington 19:43
Her name was Gay. And his wife's name was Gay.

Julia Brock 19:48
Last name?

Elayne Hunter Washington 19:49
No. Well, what was her name? Their last name was Gay. I don't remember his wife's first name. I just remember Mrs. Gay and the daughter was Deborah. But her sister was Liz, Elizabeth. And she married a

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guy who was also a bandleader at the Hamilton school, Hamilton High School in Scottdale, and he went on to play at Carnegie Hall. And that's the caliber of people that were members, you know, of Antioch.

Julia Brock 20:37
What do you remember about holiday services? Christmas?

Elayne Hunter Washington 20:42
I remember that at Christmas we always had this big calendar tea. And people would choose a month during the year and it would culminate with December. So at the tea, the people would do something, they would have food at their table that was typical of that month. Like, for instance, in October, they would have Halloween candy and popcorn, you know and stuff like that. And at Christmas, they would have Christmas ... I remember once that I did a table for ... when I was in college, I did a table for Christmas and we had the artificial fireplace there with the burning locks and stuff like that. The whole setting was just like Christmas.

Julia Brock 21:46
So the tea would take place on one day in December.

Elayne Hunter Washington 21:50
One day in December and it was a Sunday afternoon.

Julia Brock 21:55
And you remember that kind of throughout your childhood or was that something that when you're older, a teenager.

Elayne Hunter Washington 22:00
It was annual, but I remember it throughout. They always had this great calendar tea and it was a big fundraiser for the church. So each month raised their own money. However they wanted to do it, you know, and then everything would culminate at the tea itself. And I remember ... one of the main things that I remember is that they served Russian tea. And some of the ladies at the church had their own recipe for Russian tea, and it was so tasty.

Julia Brock 22:42
What else what else do you remember about the Christmas program?

Elayne Hunter Washington 22:47
Oh, I just remember that we had a great Christmas program where they would have someone to play the part of Mary and Joseph and they'd have a doll or a live baby there and they would have the three wise men and the angel would come and you know, they'd have that kind of program around Christmas.

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Julia Brock 23:15
If anybody wants to chime in [with] questions, feel free to. I just want to put that out there. How is the Christmas program ... I mean, if you had to describe how it's changed over time, because you've been an active member since the ....

Elayne Hunter Washington 23:31
It's changed a lot because now we basically have a huge choir concert at Christmas. But back then we had the whole manger setting and, you know, people would come from other churches to our Christmas play. It was sort of like a play. And we would do caroling you know, and things like that.

Julia Brock 23:54
Were you ever in the Nativity or the plays?

Elayne Hunter Washington 23:57
In the Nativity scene? I don't remember.

Julia Brock 24:00
What do you remember about Easter, the Easter program.

Elayne Hunter Washington 24:03
The same kind of thing. You know, somebody would always play Christ and there was a cross and the cross would be carried in. And then the tomb would be opened on Easter Sunday morning, but it didn't happen on Easter Sunday. It was probably the Saturday before or something like that. But I remember that we did a big thing at Easter and Christmas.

Julia Brock 24:36
What about other events on the church's calendar?

Elayne Hunter Washington 24:43
Well, we hosted some of the local conferences, like the annual conference.

Julia Brock 24:52
Of AME churches in the metro area?

Elayne Hunter Washington 24:54
Of them in the metro area. That would comprise about 120 churches. But we did host ... I remember that we hosted that event. I remember that. Once, when several of our bishops who have recently retired, were elected, there was an annual ... I mean a general conference, which is the international conference, held in Atlanta, in downtown Atlanta. And our church had some affiliation with that. I remember going

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to these big annual conferences and our choir would sing there and some of our pastors would preach annual conference sermons.

Julia Brock 25:45
Do you remember years associated with that? Maybe how old you were?

Elayne Hunter Washington 25:50
I don't remember. But I do remember going.

Julia Brock 25:58
What about Homecoming?

Elayne Hunter Washington 26:00
Oh, Homecoming was the bomb. It was always celebrated in July, the second week. And the people at the church would cook all day Saturday. And they would have these tables set out on the lawn and in the parking lot. And so each family would have like complete meals and people would go from family to family and eat from everybody. One of the ladies in the church would churn homemade ice cream. And the kids back ... there was no electric ice cream maker. So you had to actually do this and the kids would take turns doing that until the ice cream was made. And another lady in the church made homemade fried pies and they ... peach and apple. And so everybody would wait for those to get done. They were about that big [shows size with hands]. And my dad would have dug a hole in the ground and had this big black pot where he made Brunswick stew. And people came from miles to taste this Brunswick stew. And Homecoming was just really festive; we would always have another church to come and celebrate with us. We'd have an afternoon program. We'd have church, Sunday school, church, and after church, we would go out on the lawn and everybody would have this fantastic dinner. And then we'd come back in for an afternoon service.

Julia Brock 27:51
Would the service be more secular in terms of ... would it be talking about the history of the church or would it be kind of a spiritual or religious service?

Elayne Hunter Washington 27:58
It was a spiritual office where we had an invited guest to preach.

Julia Brock 28:04
. And so that ... would that church would change every year?

Elayne Hunter Washington 28:08
Pardon?

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Julia Brock 28:08
Would that church change by year?

Elayne Hunter Washington 28:10
Oh, yeah. It would change from ... depending on who our pastor was actually. You know, 'cause I think they have camaraderie among themselves. And so, one pastor would invite ... not invite the same pastor, who another pastor might invite.

Julia Brock 28:32
Would that be a community event ... I mean, would it be that people would come who had been members a long time ago ... would come back?

Elayne Hunter Washington 28:38
People would always come back for Homecoming, and that's what it is; it's a homecoming. And so people from out of town people who were past members, and some of those people would even prepare dinner. You know, when you go around and eat everybody's dinner. And I can remember on Saturday there was a grocery store up the street from us owned by one of our church people. And his wife ... the main thing that I remember that she always prepared were succulent turkey wings. And on Saturday we'd go by her house and she'd have these pans of turkey wings and melted butter that she would put on them and gosh, it was just great [laughs]. It was.

Julia Brock 29:30
Was that in ... I mean, again, just so we can try to place these in time, would that have been when you were young, a teenager...

Elayne Hunter Washington 29:38
All the way up. Hm-hmm.

Julia Brock 29:39
Okay.

Elayne Hunter Washington 29:41
From the time I was young all the way up. And they used to have fashion shows that ... it's kind of interesting remembering the fashion shows they'd have at the church. They'd have these fabulous fashion shows and ... the lady Liz who I told you about, you know, she would be affiliated with them and Aunt Helen, whose mother owned a beauty shop in the community and she was a organist. But she would be affiliated with that and, and then they were AKAs and we'd always go downtown to this major event they'd have at Christmas time. That was a big fashion show and our pastors wives would go with us and stuff.

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Julia Brock 30:36
Was the church fashion show a fundraiser?

Elayne Hunter Washington 30:38
Hm-hmm.

Julia Brock 30:38
So how would it work? Would all the kind of young girls be involved in making clothes or just ...?

Elayne Hunter Washington 30:45
No, these people would wear designer stuff. And there was one lady ... she used to go to Bloomingdale's in New York all the time and buy her wardrobe for the year and she would come back ... they actually have a school named for her in Dekalb now, Narvie Harris. But she didn't attend our church but she was friends with a lot of ... my mom and Aunt Helen and Liz.

Julia Brock 31:23
Was Aunt Helen your aunt?

Elayne Hunter Washington 31:24
Not really. She's like Uncle Danny [laughs]. She and my mom went to school together at Lab. And they grew up together, almost like sisters, but they weren't related.

Julia Brock 31:41
Do you remember her last name?

Elayne Hunter Washington 31:44
Smith ... Star[?] was her maiden name. And the church on Atlanta Avenue was here and their house was right there

Julia Brock 31:57
But do you remember the fashion shows at the older church too?

Elayne Hunter Washington 32:01
Yeah, I remember having fashion shows there as well. They were always in the basement.

Julia Brock 32:12
In that older church where were Sunday school classrooms? Were they downstairs, too?

Elayne Hunter Washington 32:20

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What I remember ... I remember some being in the rear of the church, and then downstairs. But I don't remember separate rooms downstairs. I remember a big room, I remember a kitchen. And Calvin can probably tell you more; he probably has a better memory than I do about what it was like downstairs, but I do remember some rooms in the rear of the church.

Julia Brock 32:45
What are some of the challenges the church faced in the 1950s and 1960s, let's say, when you were ... when you can remember?

Elayne Hunter Washington 32:48
Challenges like what?

Julia Brock 32:58
Anything. Challenges with leadership or with the relationship to the rest of Decatur, downtown Decatur.

Elayne Hunter Washington 33:09
Well, I remember challenges starting when we were on Atlanta Avenue, which would have been the '60s and '70s. And there was something that they called urban renewal. And so our church kept getting caught up in this urban renewal thing and Decatur planned a community that didn't really include us. And so a lot of things started to happen like I remember the people in the church saying, "They are cutting us off and we're not going to be able to access the church," and we had to buy the street that the church was on or something like that. I was not old enough to really be totally involved in it, but the remnants of all of that activity came back to me and a lot of our officers and pastors at the time ...there was some distrust going on among the officers of the church and a couple of the pastors that maybe the pastor was selling us out and, you know, things of that nature. So those were some really big challenges.

Julia Brock 34:30
Do you want to name that pastor on camera?

Elayne Hunter Washington 34:34
Well, Frank Maddox was one of them. And when Larry Hudson came in, he, quote, uncovered a lot of stuff that was going on that we weren't really aware of. That's as much as I'll say about that. Frank was an opportunist and so he kind of was involved.

Julia Brock 35:03
So he was there in 1960s and '70s.

Elayne Hunter Washington 35:06
He was there in ... girl, I can't ... yeah, he was there in the '80s, maybe. And Hudson was there in the '90s. I mean, well, we moved to this location in '96. So, you know, prior to that Hudson was pastor

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before Wicker came. So yeah, Frank would have been there in the late '70s, early '80s is what I'm recalling. I got married in '70 ... something.

Julia Brock 35:51
You got married in the church...

Elayne Hunter Washington 35:55
Adams married me and shortly following that ... that was that would have been ...'78 is when I got married. And so Reverend Adams was our pastor in 1978. And that would have been just before Maddox came. So Maddox came in the really the late '70s, early '80s. He would have been our pastor then.

Julia Brock 36:34
What about ... were there other fundraisers we should note on camera?

Elayne Hunter Washington 36:40
Well, there were lots of different fundraisers. When the officers decided that we needed to raise money, a lot of the missionaries went to work. They would sell fish and chitlins and .... they had chitlin dinners at church. Yeah. And they sold fish and stuff like that, the ladies. And they sold to the whole community; they had a delivery system set up. It was like they were running some kind of business, you know what I'm saying? And they would deliver to the businesses in the area, like to the beauty shops and barber shops, they'd deliver there and I think they did extremely well doing that, but the missionaries are mainly the main group that handled them.

Julia Brock 37:35
And forgive my ignorance, but that was missionary women?

Elayne Hunter Washington 37:39
Yeah. Oh, yeah. The Missionary Society is an international ... it's a connectional organization.

Julia Brock 37:50
When did you graduate from the YPD into the Missionary Society?

Elayne Hunter Washington 37:57
I will say ... I'm trying to think ... I was ... there was a ... I had a friend who I worked with who was a member of our church, whose brother was an AME bishop. And in ... this was in ... Chad [Ms. Hunter's son] was born in '76, so around the late '70s we met, we started a business. And we had a touring company in Atlanta.

Julia Brock 38:43

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You and your husband?

Elayne Hunter Washington 38:44
No, my girlfriend and I. And we met some of the connectional missionaries who had just come back here from Africa, and they had their international meeting in Atlanta. That's when I really started working with the missionaries. But I ... I was probably in my 20s, late 20s. And you know what, they made Calvin, my brother, and I trustees. And he worked for IBM Corporation and I worked for the Federal Reserve Bank. And you know, the people were so resentful to young people in leadership roles. And

Julia Brock 39:35
You mean within the church?

Elayne Hunter Washington 39:36
Within the church, yeah. They didn't want us to talk at meetings. They didn't want to hear anything we had to say. It was such a struggle. And we were constantly trying to prove ourselves to our elders, you know, that we run major corporations on a day-to-day basis, but you're telling us we cannot run Antioch. Yeah. So it was a real big struggle for us back then. And I remember Aunt Helen, that lady, her mom was a trustee and every time we'd go to a meeting, she would sit there and pray the entire meeting, that things did not explode. So, for me, it was tragic, you know, because it was just a real funny time. And finally, we got some acceptance as officers in the church, but it took a long time.

Julia Brock 40:42
What kinds of things were expected of you as trustee?

Elayne Hunter Washington 40:45
Well, the trustees were accountable for the hardware like the church building, the ... you know, maintaining the property. Some of the mess that was going on with the City of Decatur and the urban renewal, some of that would have been more tied to the trustees than the Steward Board. So the trustees in African Methodism are accountable for all of that.

Julia Brock 41:24
What do you remember about the Civil Rights Movement in Decatur and as it affected the church?

Elayne Hunter Washington 41:35
I just remember when King was arrested in Dekalb County there was a lot of talk about it. I don't remember a lot. I don't remember a lot of demonstrations there. I don't remember sit-ins; there was some sit-ins in the city of Decatur, but not a lot. Just don't remember a lot of activity relative to the Movement. I knew that our ancestors were involved early on when the church was first started. You know, that we were a community church meeting the needs of the community back then. But I don't remember, during

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the '60s, much going on in our city and in our church. I remember that some people came to our church and had hosted meetings. You know, there were some meetings going on. I remember that Annie Chewning was involved with a lot of people who had political ... held political offices, and that there was a lot of discussion going on her porch. But that's all that I really remember. I just don't remember a lot of activity other than when King was arrested in Dekalb County, and I think that had something to do with a sit-in. And a lot of people were saying that he was a troublemaker. You know, a lot of the people, they just wanted to be even, you know, they don't want to rouse things. More or less. So, just maintain their existence there. While I felt like the bigger community in Decatur was more interested in putting us out.

Robin Morris 41:36
When did the church move out here [to Stone Mountain]?

Elayne Hunter Washington 43:59
1996.

Robin Morris 44:01
What do you remember about that decision?

Elayne Hunter Washington 44:04
Well, I was married and my former husband was a minister. And his churches were in Coweta County and Canton and places like that. So, I was more out there, and I had a family and a career. So, I was more out there than I was at church. But I do recall that when Reverend Wicker was appointed to our church, he came in with the attitude that we needed to move the church. And so they tried to ... they had a big fundraiser where they were raffling off a car. And they were placing a lot of emphasis on this car that they were trying to raffle off to make money to move. And a lot of people were paying thousands of dollars into a fund, you know, to help the church get out of the area where we were because they felt like we were being pushed out of downtown Decatur based on the fact that they were building around us and kind of closing and locking us in and it was difficult for ... and whereas people used to live around the church, a lot of that didn't exist anymore; like the street that we lived on, White Street--White Street didn't exist anymore. You know, when we were growing up White Street was a major street; had a big hill, people skated on it and rolled backs up and down that hill, you know, us kids, and it was right there where the church was and everything but that didn't exist any longer. So, and that's kind of what I remember. Some people left the church because they didn't want to relocate. And then some people were gung ho about the relocation. And so they found ... Calvin can probably inform you a little bit more about finding this location.

Julia Brock 46:25
So where did you go to school? Can you say a little bit about your schooling and career?

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Elayne Hunter Washington 46:31
Right? I went to Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic school, elementary school, which is on Auburn Avenue across from the King Center. And then my class was the second class to integrate the parochial schools in Atlanta. So I attended St. Joseph High School, and it was on Cortland Street, right where the Marriott Marquis is now. The whole block was where .. there's a church still there. And Marist used to be there and St. Joseph nursing school was on that campus, and St. Joseph High School. And so I went to St. Joseph High School. And I felt after graduating from St. Joseph I needed a Black experience. And I was an AME and Morris Brown was an AME school, and I was determined to have a Black experience so I ended up at Morris Brown. I did my undergraduate work there and I did my graduate work at University of Utah in an off-campus program that came to Atlanta every week for two years.

Julia Brock 47:51
What was your focus or degrees?

Elayne Hunter Washington 47:54
Okay, so my bachelor's is in Psychology from Brown and Human Resource Management, the MS is in Human Resource Management. And so I worked in HR with BlueCross and BlueShield of Georgia, Atlanta. And when I left there, I went to work for the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta and I did all of their professional recruitment for them. So I did that and after I left the Fed ... I left the Fed when I had my second kid, because I wanted to be a stay-at-home mom.

Julia Brock 48:31
So your first [degree] was 1976 and your second was ...?

Elayne Hunter Washington 48:33
1980. And I started selling real estate; I became a realtor. I was one of the first Black realtors with REMAX Corporation in Atlanta. And then I became an entrepreneur and I started a touring and sightseeing company, and we did that for a number of years. And following that I moved into the environmental community where I managed a forest preserve in the middle of the city. And I became an Environmental Educator of the Year for the state of Georgia.

Julia Brock 48:42
What year?

Elayne Hunter Washington 49:24
I can't remember what year it was, but I know that Zell Miller was the governor because he presented me the award.

Julia Brock 49:32
That's wonderful.

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Elayne Hunter Washington 49:32
Yeah. And also became president of EarthShare when it moved to Atlanta. I was a Board member and became president of the Board of EarthShare. Because we had started a workplace giving organization called the Environmental Fund for Georgia and it turned into EarthShare when EarthShare, I guess, bought us out. I'm not really sure how the semantics happened with that. But I ended up being president of that Board. It was quite challenging because there weren't that many African Americans in the environmental movement. So it was kind tough.

Julia Brock 50:19
Well, to backtrack a little bit, what were your experiences as an integrator of St. Joseph's?

Elayne Hunter Washington 50:24
Oh, you know what? It was quite an experience for one thing. I actually have a very close friend who went to school with me then and we're still friends now. And she is still bitter about St. Joe's. I'm not as bitter as she was. I don't know that my experience was any better than hers. But it was pretty tough, you know? They ... I remember when Kennedy died, was killed. We went to school that day. And when the news came out the kids ... some of the white kids started blaming us, saying, you know, "Y'all are responsible for him being dead," and it was like that kind of stuff, you know. And the school was downtown and we had to come through town to get back and forth. So we would do things like we go to Krystal [hamburgers], we walk in the door at Krystal with our little friends who were white, and they wouldn't serve us [laughs]. So it was ... I mean, it was really quite challenging. We had a religion class and they invited some Black Muslims to our class one day, and that was pretty terrible. That ended up being pretty terrible.

Julia Brock 52:08
In terms of the reactions of whites?

Elayne Hunter Washington 52:10
In terms of ... yeah, from them and us, you know. But the experience academically was great. I took four years of French and my French teacher was from Belgium. And I ended up reading the whole novel Dante in French. And when I went to Morris Brown, I did people's homework for money for gas money. So, you know, that was a big help from St. Joseph; that helped me out [laughs]. But you know what, one of the worst memories that I have from St. Joe's is that for our senior trip, we went to Panama City [Florida]. And there was one Black guy who dated a white girl who was a football player, and nobody on campus cared because he was a great football player. Okay, so we go to Panama City, and they're walking along the beach and long story short, they put us and the nuns and priests out of the hotel because of that couple, and we ended up sleeping on the bus. And I did not return to Panama City until probably about four years ago. Because I had a hang up about it. I'll never forget sleeping on that bus.

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Robin Morris 53:48
Do you mean ... when you say us, do you mean just the Black students?

Elayne Hunter Washington 53:51
No, everybody, they put the entire class out of the hotel, the nuns, the priests, everybody. And we ended up having to sleep on the bus. And so it soured our trip tremendously and it soured me from returning to Panama City all these years until about four years ago.

Elayne Hunter Washington 54:02
What year did you graduate?

Elayne Hunter Washington 54:18
From St. Joe's? In '67. And you know, what was funny was, we used to have to go up about 200 steps to enter the Fox Theater on the back side, and most of our parents didn't want us to even go to that movie theater because that was the only way that we were allowed in. And by the time I graduated, we graduated there, and we marched in the front door. How amazing is that?

Julia Brock 54:57
Did the Ritz Theatre stay open in your teen years?

Elayne Hunter Washington 55:00
Yeah, it was open. But you know, and then Antioch, we used to go downtown to movies with our YPD.

Julia Brock 55:14
Downtown Atlanta?

Elayne Hunter Washington 55:15
Uh-huh. And we had a club at church called the John and Jackie Kennedy Club. And you know, they loved the Kennedys, and my mom and Helen and Liz and all of them were our chaperones.

Julia Brock 55:35
What kind of things would y'all do?

Elayne Hunter Washington 55:37
We'd have barbecues and parties and we'd take field trips and stuff like that.

Julia Brock 55:46
Well, what else ... I'll ask the same question because I've taken up a lot of your time, but if someone were to listen to this, you know, way down the road, what would you want them to know about any Antioch or the history of Antioch?

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Elayne Hunter Washington 56:00
Oh, you know what? I would really like for them to know that the people who founded Antioch only three years after the end of the Civil War in 1868 were forward thinking people and very intelligent former slaves, and that the history is so rich. You know, back then people came to Antioch to learn how to read so that they could adapt to their new lives in freedom. And today we are working in the area of social action and trying to help register people to vote and bringing up issues. We do a quarterly talk on areas that are relative to what's happening now in our communities like human trafficking and things like that. Blacks and mental health, you know, stuff like that. So we're still playing an ample part in our community, and have become, again, a focal point, I feel, in the community and that's what I'd like for people to take away with them. Is that, you know, a group of ... since I've worked with the History Committee and some of the history that I've learned about the church, that I even didn't know back then, and as I glimpse back and think about the caliber of people who founded our church and stayed with it, and then to see our church today, I'd like for the people to really understand that Antioch is a very historic church with a lot under its belt. I remember that we always had a historian, always, and she always recorded history.

Julia Brock 58:13
Was it always a woman?

Elayne Hunter Washington 58:14
It was always the same woman. It was Sylvia's [Clarke] mother.

Julia Brock 58:17
[To the group] Any other questions? Thank you.

Elayne Hunter Washington 58:27
Oh, you're welcome.

Julia Brock 58:29
Is there anything else you'd like to say before I turn [the recorders] off?

Elayne Hunter Washington 58:31
My pleasure [laughs]?

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