Miriam Simon Causey Oral History Interview

January 21, 2018

Julia Brock 00:02
...And this is running. Okay. I'll just introduce by saying I'm Julia Brock. I'm from the University of West Georgia. And I'm here interviewing ... will you state your whole name?

Miriam Causey 00:21
Miriam Simon Causey.

Julia Brock 00:23
Thank you so much. We're here to talk about the history of Antioch A.M.E. and in the room also are Elayne Washington Hunter and Calvin Washington, who are also going to be interviewed, and Robin Morris is here from Agnes Scott. Thank you for sitting down today. And I'll just start by asking you to tell me a little bit about your background. When and where were you born?

Miriam Causey 00:50
I was born in Decatur at Dekalb Medical Center.

Julia Brock 00:54
And would you mind saying the year?

Miriam Causey 00:59
I was born 1962, November 27 1962.

Julia Brock 01:03
And will tell a little bit about your family, your background, your parents or brothers and sisters?

Miriam Causey 01:10
I grew up in a blended family. My mother and my father were both members of Antioch. My mother passed when I was two years old. My father remarried when I was five and my stepmother became a member of Antioch. My stepmother is really the only mother I've known. She's my mother. And we grew up as a family. I have two sisters and one brother.

Julia Brock 01:36
Did you grew up near the church?

Miriam Causey 01:38
Yes. I grew up near the old church that was on Atlanta Avenue. We were about maybe a mile or two miles from there.

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Julia Brock 01:48
Okay. So just after you were born, the church had moved to Atlanta/Hibernia Avenue. Is that right?

Miriam Causey 01:59
Yes.

Julia Brock 02:01
And your family had been members for generations?

Miriam Causey 02:05
Yes, my father's family. My father's parents were members of Antioch. They moved to Decatur in the 1920s. And they were members since then.

Julia Brock 02:17
Do you mind saying their names?

Miriam Causey 02:20
My grandfather was Boykin Simon and my grandmother was Hattie Simon.

Julia Brock 02:25
Okay, wonderful. What are your earliest memories of the church?

Miriam Causey 02:36
My earliest memories are the choir singing, being in Sunday school every Sunday ... mainly just being at the church a lot and knowing everybody. It was a smaller church and everybody was family and related in some ways it seems like, so just knowing everybody.

Julia Brock 03:00
And we'll come back to the church and there's some specific questions about the church but will you also describe Beacon Hill or what your childhood was like growing up in Decatur?

Miriam Causey 03:19
I don't really know much about Beacon Hill. I know my father grew up in that area and he attended Herring Street. And I grew up on the other side of Decatur behind Agnes Scott. So, the church was over on Atlanta Avenue and I remember a few businesses were there--Ms. Doris' beauty salon, where my mother used to go to get her hair done. We used to go to Ebster Recreation Park, go swimming and go to the park over there. So that's really all I know about Beacon Hill. I know a lot of people lived in the projects that were around Ebster. But I don't really remember much about that area when I was growing up.

Julia Brock 04:10
Where did you do your schooling, your elementary school?

Miriam Causey 04:13

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I went to Our Lady of Lourdes elementary school. That was downtown so my mother used to drive us down every day.

Julia Brock 04:23
And what did your parents do for work?

Miriam Causey 04:27
My dad worked at Lockheed Martin, and my mother was a homemaker.

Julia Brock 04:30
Oh, wow. So did he drive up [to Marietta]?

Miriam Causey 04:32
Yes.

Julia Brock 04:32
Wow. And you were going to talk about your brothers and sisters before I interrupted, but were they older or younger?

Miriam Causey 04:42
My brother is the oldest and then I have an older sister and a younger sister.

Julia Brock 04:46
Do you mind saying their names?

Miriam Causey 04:47
My brother's name is James Simon. And my sister is Monica P. Millines. My younger sister is Meta Simon.

Julia Brock 05:03
We talked about your earliest memories of Antioch but how often would you be there on a given week?

Miriam Causey 05:11
In a week's time, I would say we will probably there maybe four days a week, three to four days a week, between going to the choir rehearsal and club meetings with my mom for some type of meeting, an Usher Board meeting, and Sunday school, church. Then, a lot of times they were programs in the evening on Sunday, so we would go back to church on Sunday evening. So we were there a lot.

Julia Brock 05:40
And what was your mother .... what types of clubs was she involved in, in the church?

Miriam Causey 05:45
She was a member of the G.C. Terrell club, I remember. And I think they were called the Fidelity Club before then. I spent a lot of time with my aunts, too. My aunts, all of them were members of the Missionary Society, the Stewardess Board. So between going either with my mother or with one of my aunts to the church ... let me see,

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the Missionary Society, the Stewardess Board, Fidelity Club. I can't remember any more of the club names but there were a lot of them [laughs].

Julia Brock 06:14
Do you remember what the G.C. Terrell Club, which had been the Fidelity Club, what that was focused on? What kind of works it was focused on?

Miriam Causey 06:41
They were more of a women's social club. They would also do missionary work or community work, doing baskets for the community, you know, doing things during the holidays for the community.

Julia Brock 07:00
And then you mentioned programs on Sunday evenings. Were those related to church teachings or were they something different?

Miriam Causey 07:11
They were both, I guess. I remember Usher Board anniversaries, choir anniversaries. It would always be more of a full service or program with another church service during the evening.

Julia Brock 07:33
Was your father involved in any of the groups related to the church?

Miriam Causey 07:40
Over the years, he was a Trustee, I think. He was also an usher. And he was just around ... the men of the church used to do things, so we would be there if they were repairing something or just on Saturdays cleaning up. My uncle was the custodian; my father's oldest brother was the custodian so we were there with him cleaning up the church sometimes.

Julia Brock 08:12
What was his name?

Miriam Causey 08:13
His name was Willie J. Simon.

Julia Brock 08:18
What about programs for children? So when you were young, were there specific programs or groups for children?

Miriam Causey 08:26
Yes, there was the Children's Choir, the YPP, which was the Young People's Department, and that was sort of missionary training, I guess, to teach you how to work in the church. There was the children's Usher Board and then Vacation Bible School. During the summer, when I was growing up, Vacation Bible School was a whole week and it was during the day and we were at church all day doing ... we would learn Bible verses, we would learn songs, we would do arts and crafts. It was, again, kinda like family. We would have holiday programs,

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Christmas, Easter; Black History, we will do a full Black History program. I can't think of what else but there was a lot for children to do.

Julia Brock 09:26
I'm curious to know more about the holiday programs and then I'm going to come back to some of the others you mentioned. What do you remember about the Christmas program when you were young?

Miriam Causey 09:38
We would do speeches; everyone will have a Christmas speech. Everybody would be dressed up .... plays ... and then the church would always give us something for Christmas, candy or a stocking ... there was always something, some gift.

Julia Brock 10:03
And would the speeches be ones that children wrote or would they be you know reciting a Gospel verse or ...?

Miriam Causey 10:12
They were, I guess, from books; speeches from books. Some of them might be scriptural or some of them might have just been lines.

Julia Brock 10:24
What about Easter programs?

Miriam Causey 10:28
It would be the same; it would be plays and speeches. We would have an Easter egg hunt. A long time ago, the Easter egg hunt used to be on Easter Monday because we'd be out of school the Monday after Easter also. And I just remember, everybody had to go to Easter rehearsal. We would start rehearsing maybe two months before Easter came and just go to rehearsal every week.

Julia Brock 10:59
Were the [egg] hunts on the grounds on Atlanta Avenue?

Miriam Causey 11:02
Yes.

Julia Brock 11:06
And for Black History Month programs, do you remember the content of some of any of those?

Miriam Causey 11:11
Yes. When I was younger (I'm telling my age) it was a Black History Week. So everybody would be given a person to learn about, then we would do our presentations during church, and it would be ... more or less the whole program would be Black history where everybody would present the person they learned about.

Julia Brock 11:43
Would that have been in February? Is it still the same way as it is now?

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Miriam Causey 11:46
Yes.

Julia Brock 11:46
Really interestingly, we found these great services from the 1920s and 30s of Douglass celebrations, around Frederick Douglass' birthday. So I wonder if that was a continuation of those earlier services. It's really neat. Who was pastor when you were young?

Miriam Causey 12:18
Reverend Dr. Flanagan was the first pastor I remember. And he used to come to Sunday school. One thing I remember about him, he took us to Underground Atlanta. He had a Cadillac, and we would all be in the Cadillac going to Underground Atlanta. And we would also go to ... I can't even remember what you call it now but it was at Morris Brown College every year. It was the part of the conference, I guess?

Calvin Washington 12:47
The Sunday School Convention.

Miriam Causey 12:49
The Sunday School Convention.

Elayne Hunter Washington 12:50
And the Leadership Conference.

Miriam Causey 12:52
Yes, the Leadership Conference. We would go there every year. But Dr. Flanagan was the first pastor I remember. Then after that Reverend Adams. I don't know them in order [laughs].

Julia Brock 13:17
When Dr. Flanagan took y'all on trips was that maybe with the YPD or would he just take young people?

Miriam Causey 13:25
I guess it was the YPD mostly because the missionaries would go, Mrs. Dixon ... some of the ladies would also be there. So I guess it was the YPD.

Julia Brock 13:40
Were there other events that you remember in addition to the major holidays at the church? For example, Homecoming or Founders Day.

Miriam Causey 13:50
I remember Homecoming. Homecoming used to be in July, the second Sunday in July or third Sunday. And it was a big celebration where everybody would bring food. And you always, you always knew what everybody was bringing, I guess--who was going to bring cakes, who was going to bring food. And I love cake so I'd bring cake [laughs]. But I remember at the Homecoming celebrations being a very big deal.

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Julia Brock 14:23
Did you have a sense of the history of the church? Because by that time it was almost 100 years old, or was 100 years old as you were coming up.

Miriam Causey 14:35
I remember the history being read, being in the program every year and being read.

Julia Brock 14:44
Did your grandparents ever talk about what Antioch was like when they first moved to Decatur in the 20s and 30s?

Miriam Causey 14:53
I remember my aunts and uncles and my dad talking about what it was like when it was the old church on Marshall Street; I remember hearing them talk about it.

Julia Brock 15:13
What do you remember about Sunday services? So with Dr. Flanagan, let's say, what were his Sunday services like?

Miriam Causey 15:23
I guess I was so young when he was there. I remember him because of his hair. And I remember he used to yell, you know, that was my memory of him [laughs]. I remember more of the pastors when I was a teenager, and young adult, but Dr. Flanagan, I remember his hair. I remember him taking us places. I remember Reverend Adams had a daughter my sister's age so we spent a lot of time with him and his family. Sunday ... Am I talking about Sunday services with Pastor Flanagan or [inaudible]?

Julia Brock 16:09
Either one; we're happy to collect any and all memories.

Miriam Causey 16:15
The Sunday services ... I remember going to Sunday school and then church afterwards and if we were singing in the choir or ushering we would do that. If not, we would just be seated in the audience mostly. I remember being told to be quiet a lot [laughs]. And the services ... I liked the services growing up more, I guess, because we sung hymns and now we don't really don't sing hymns at church, but I really like hymns. The singing has always been my favorite more so, I guess, than the sermons when I was younger because I would listen but I didn't really understand. As I got older and read the Bible more it would click, what I heard when I was younger. But I remember just being in service and the choir was my favorite part.

Julia Brock 17:20
Something we found in our research is that there were these kind of public events that I mentioned--you know, Douglass's birthday ... was the church, did it hold other public events where folks from the community would come?

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Miriam Causey 17:37
I don't remember at the old church, but then again, I may not have been that involved in it. I know since we moved here, we've had a lot of public events, a lot of political events, but at the old church ... well, I take that back. I do remember ... I guess around election time more there would be events.

Julia Brock 18:02
Would those be, like, speakers about candidates?

Miriam Causey 18:11
Yeah.

Julia Brock 18:19
My next question, actually, and something I'll ask both of you was the church's involvement in political movements of the time ... the 1960s of course, Civil Rights Movement had been in place, but was still you know, going on and, you know, effecting change. Do you remember anything related to the church and the Civil Rights Movement? I know you were very young.

Miriam Causey 18:40
No not really.

Julia Brock 18:45
How has the church changed since you've been a member, since your childhood?

Miriam Causey 18:52
It's grown a lot. There are more peope. It doesn't seem as connected sometimes to me; connected in different ways, I guess. When I was younger and everybody lived around the church or near the church, it was more ... I don't know how to say it. People seemed like they were closer and knew more about each other and what was going on.

Miriam Causey 19:23
Yeah, more family-oriented. Now, there's a lot of people and a lot of different events going on. A lot of times I feel like I'm just kind of lost. I don't know everything or I don't know what's going on. But I don't think it's bad. I think growth is good. So, even though it's different, there's still some connection, not as close it seems like, but some connection.

Elayne Hunter Washington 19:23
Family-oriented.

Julia Brock 19:47
And have you been an active member throughout your adulthood too?

Miriam Causey 19:51
Yes, pretty much.

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Julia Brock 19:53
And so what did you go on to do in terms of your school and life and career and family?

Miriam Causey 20:02
Well, I went to college here in Atlanta and I worked for AT&T for 18 years. And now I'm doing more social services so I'm still working in the community. But family, I was married, I have two kids and 3 grandkids and my family has always been a member of the church. I've been more active when I was younger than I am now, in Sunday school and everything, so I'm trying to get active again, but I've always been involved, but sometimes more heavily than others. I play the piano, so that's one thing I didn't mention that I grew up doing. I played piano for the Sunday school from eight or nine maybe until I was a teenager and then I started playing for other churches, but I still play at Antioch, too. And I played for the youth choir. My cousin is the ... she was the music director for a long time so I played along with her whenever she wanted me to. And then I've played as an adult for the Sunday school for different things.

Julia Brock 21:22
How did you learn as a child?

Miriam Causey 21:24
Learn piano? My mother ... we had lessons starting probably first grade. And I had lessons all the way up through college in piano and then organ and then I dabble on the guitar a little but not much, not as much as I like.

Julia Brock 21:45
I'm curious too, when you were involved in the YPD and other youth organizations did y'all ever organize ... were you social with other churches in the neighborhood like Lily Hill?

Miriam Causey 22:02
Yes.

Julia Brock 22:03
What kinds of things would y'all do together?

Miriam Causey 22:08
Choir, anniversaries, concerts, I guess, Vacation Bible School; we would go to Vacation Bible School at Thankful [Baptist] and Lily Hill and just go to different programs there. I guess my family had family at both Thankful and Lily Hill and then at some churches in Scottdale so we were always going to a church somewhere every Sunday. Or even during the week we were always at a church somewhere.

Julia Brock 22:40
So if someone listens to this 100 years from now, what are some of the things that you want that person to know about the history of Antioch or your time at Antioch? How it's changed, anything like that?

Miriam Causey 22:58
I want them to know that Antioch was the ... well, is the oldest Black church in Decatur. And to know that that community used to be a very close-knit community. And that the church is still active, even though we're not in

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Decatur itself or in the city of Decatur, but we're still active in the Dekalb County and still welcome everyone to come.

Julia Brock 23:30
Thank you. Would y'all like me to ask anything else or do you think I missed anything? Okay, okay. Thank you so much. I'll turn off the recorders.

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