

A HISTORY OF TENNIS IN SAINT PAUL'S BLACK COMMUNITY

MLK Tennis Buffs, Inc.

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Interview with Lucille Bryant Little
14 September 2019, at 3055 NE Columbia Ave., Minneapolis, MN 55418

Maya Washington: Could you tell me your name please?

Lucille Bryant Little: Yes, my name is Lucille Bryant Little.

Maya Washington: And can you tell me your earliest memory of tennis?

Lucille Bryant Little: We did not have tennis courts in my neighborhood. I think I was introduced to tennis when, in high school where it was a part of the curriculum to have a, you know, unit on tennis. We did have tennis courts at the school. And the tennis kids did go out and play tennis. But the activities were for after school, which I did not participate in because our school was so far from my home. We had to take two buses to get to school and therefore we didn't participate. But we stayed after school to play tennis, to play any sport. It would be dark when we got home, so we didn't, I didn't, nor my friends participated in tennis during high school.

Maya Washington: And so can you tell me why you were bused to a different school?

Lucille Bryant Little: Well, yes it was during the time that they were building new schools and rather than build one school in a black neighborhood, another school in the white neighborhood, they built just a superior high school. I mean this high school was fantastic, but it was way out in an area where the wealthy people lived called Hyde Park. And it, I mean, right today the school is just, I go there and I'm still amazed at how beautiful it is. It has a clock tower in the middle and it was just a lovely, lovely school.

Maya Washington: So was this, was the intention for this to be an integrated school?

Lucille Bryant Little: Yes, yes, yes. But the black kids had to be bused in, because the other white kids were already there in Hyde Park.

Maya Washington: So now moving forward into when you were introduced to tennis as an adult, can you tell me about when you started actually becoming a person who played tennis?

Lucille Bryant Little: My son became interested in tennis after declining to take piano lessons. He says "Can I take tennis lessons." And at the time we had a member in our group who played with us, who taught tennis. I mean, excuse me, taught piano. So he taught. I recruited him to teach Bobby piano as a result.

Maya Washington: When did you start playing?

- Lucille Bryant Little: Okay. When I started taking my son, I wanted to tell you that when he started, when my son Bobby, who was about nine or 10 at the time, started playing tennis, I would have to take him to the tennis lessons. And I spent so much time with taking him that I just decided to play too. So we were at the playground and we, that's when I believe I became interested. And then my friend Joetta would be there with her daughter. And her daughter and Bobby would play together. And Joetta and I would hit the ball back and forth, but I really didn't become really that involved in tennis until I started taking lessons. And my son was taking lessons and these lessons were given to us by Ernie Greene.
- Maya Washington: And so tell me, if I was an alien from another planet and I'd never heard of Ernie Greene, could you describe what he looked like? What his demeanor was?
- Lucille Bryant Little: Ernie was a very handsome man. First time I met him I said, "Hmm, Joetta, who's that?" But anyway, he was a very kind person. You know, everybody, you know, you know, sometimes some people have charisma. People just gravitate to you. He was one of these people and he welcomed that. I think he knew that. He had just retired from his position at the University of Minnesota as a, I think he was a scientist there. And we heard that he was, he was a very good player. I had never seen him play, but we knew he played and my girlfriend Joetta, she asked him, could he teach here, give her some tennis lessons? And then of course he said yes, he would refuse nobody. He would always have time for people to take time. So Joetta had lessons from him for a couple of times and then he told her, said, well, Joetta, you know, really you're going to have to have somebody to hit with for practice.
- Lucille Bryant Little: You know, he says "You get all the lessons you want, but if you don't practice, you're not gonna, you know, make much progress." So she asked me to come and play tennis with them and I was delighted to because I'd always wanted to play tennis. I had been on the courts a few times at odd parks and things and tried hitting the ball back and forth and found out. I thought it was very difficult. But anyway, then I really became interested. Learning tennis was difficult for me because I had picked up some bad habits and Ernie had to reteach us. But he was very patient and I wanted to learn to correct too, also because my son was taking lessons.
- Maya Washington: And so tell me about, for someone who doesn't know that tennis is more than just hitting the ball, can you tell me about some of the things that Mr. Greene taught you about? Serves or anything particular about how to play the game that was helpful?
- Lucille Bryant Little: Ernie was very conscientious about teaching us the correct way. So he joined the American Tennis Association and took their tests in order to become certified because he wanted to make sure he was teaching us the right way and I admired him for that.
- Maya Washington: Can you tell me what the ATA is and why it was important to African Americans?

Lucille Bryant Little: Many of us developed our skills to the level that we could play in tournaments. And we became interested in the American Tennis Association, which is tennis association that was formed doing, um, was formed by black people.

Maya Washington: So what made the ATA different than the USTA?

Lucille Bryant Little: Well, it was fun. The ATA, whether it was the United States Tennis Association that had been in existence for years and people like Arthur Ashe was not a member of that. He wasn't invited to join. So the ATA was established to help to provide more tennis instructions and structure and fun for the Afro-Americans. And our skills got to the point we thought we could play. We joined the ATA and several of the Buffs went to the different places. And the thing that I found out was so much fun about it, being from Minnesota, where there's few black people. The ATA was all black and you'd go to these tournaments. And I remember when we went to Richmond, Virginia, that was really fun cause everybody, everybody there was black and they all played tennis and it was really a lot of fun. And we didn't care whether we, you know, lost or not, but it was competitive and they gave out nice trophies and it was nice to bring the trophies back home to the Minnesota and show them.

Maya Washington: So you told me about what your impressions of Mr. Greene were. What do you think his impressions were of you? What were the things that stuck out to you about how he was teaching you or what he was to help you with?

Lucille Bryant Little: Well, I think that, like I said, he was very soft spoken and he really didn't criticize. He would just tell you to practice and practice, you know, that was his main thing that he did. And then as a school teacher, I think I was a little bit more firm working with the children than he was because some of the kids sometimes would misbehave and he would never chastise them or anything. But I would, and he sometimes would ask me, was I kinda hard on such a such a person? And I would say "No." So I didn't like him criticizing me for being tough on the kids. So that I made sure this one boy got into his class the next, the next day, and all of a sudden I heard this booming sound. "DJ go home!" Even he had to become more strict with the children. But he was, he was really soft spoken. And another thing that Ernie did, he would ask about their grades. When report card time came out, he would ask about the report card. And Kathy was one of the students. She would always get straight A's and Bobby would get pretty good few As and a few Bs, but he always stressed to them how important it was to be in school and to get good grades. He was very, very patient, extremely patient.

Maya Washington: So tell me about how things evolved at MLK courts that led you all to start an organization. So tell me about a Saturday or Sunday and how many people were there and what people were doing while they were there.

Lucille Bryant Little: You know, I really wish my friend Joetta McAdams was here with me because she could even fill in some things that I'm sure I can't think of, but the tennis courts in Minnesota really it became our meeting place. We used to call it our

black country club. I mean we would meet there and play, and Esther would come, Ernie would come. Then they started getting us more organized, like playing matches against one another. And we would stay all day, you know, leave to go to the lavatory and come back. And it was just really a lot of fun. It was a focus point. If you didn't have anything to do almost any day of the week, go down to the MLK tennis courts. And I remember Joetta and I used to, when Ernie had taught us to play, we were just, the two of us would be back there just hitting the ball back and forth and practicing.

Lucille Bryant Little: And we had no problem, you know. But then it started getting, we would go down to play and we couldn't get on the court. I mean other people were on the courts, you know, and we almost felt like this was our court. But anyway, that's the way it grew. And then people had to sit down and take turns, you know, play rise and fly. You play a game and when you lose, you sit down, the next person in line would come up. So we kind of organize that ourselves and it made us feel good knowing that people in our neighborhood all around the neighborhood who hadn't used the tennis courts were using them. And people from Minneapolis started coming and playing with us. And that's when we started talking about forming an organization. And all of us were adults and playing tennis. And we were thinking to ourselves, what a good idea had our kids started when they were younger. So then that's when we started thinking about, not only the adults playing tennis. And organizing parties, we had parties and tournaments, but let's start working with the kids too.

Maya Washington: Can you remember whose idea it was to make a formal organization and tell me about that meeting you all had I think at your house?

Lucille Bryant Little: Yeah. Well, you know, some person came up with a good idea. I'd say it was common. The idea hit Joetta, me, Ernie. I mean I think that's collectively the three people I'm sure simply because the three of us started together, you know, but I'm sure there were others. Oswald Johnson was there and I think, Oh I can't remember the people who were there.

Maya Washington: Tell me about Joetta, what was her full name? Her first and last name.

Lucille Bryant Little: Her name was Joetta McAdams. That was my best buddy. Okay. I'm talking about my best friend now. Joetta was my best buddy. We did everything together. We had children born, our last children were born around the same time and Joetta and I were just like sisters. I mean I felt like a sister to her. And as a matter of fact, Joetta had this younger sister who was very jealous of me because she and I were so close. We did everything together. We took swimming lessons together, we traveled to Hawaii together, we went shopping together. We played bridge and everywhere you saw one of us, the other was there. She was just my very best friend and I miss her.

Maya Washington: Could you say her full name again?

- Lucille Bryant Little: Joetta McAdams.
- Maya Washington: Where was she from?
- Lucille Bryant Little: Joetta was born and raised in St. Paul, which was odd. I mean unusual.
- Maya Washington: So tell me about the meeting. You all came together in your house?
- Lucille Bryant Little: Yes. We all met at my house and just formed the organization. We voted that Ernie become the founder because he was the one who really got all of us involved and taught us. And that first meeting, I think I was the vice president. I think Helen Reed was the secretary. Or was she the treasurer? I don't remember. And we had a treasurer. We had it very simple to begin with. And then we just decided when we were going to meet and we would meet, after the meeting at my house. We met at the tennis courts, either outside or in one of the club rooms at the Martin Luther King Center.
- Maya Washington: What did you all agree would be the purpose of the organization?
- Lucille Bryant Little: Well, the purpose of the organization is for people to enjoy tennis. It is so important as an older adult now, it's so important that I had, that I had tennis in my life, especially when I was young and I can foster my child, I could participate, you know, traveling around. I think I went to about five or six different cities with the ATA and now just watching the other kids play, watching the young kids play. And I thoroughly enjoy it now. And I'm very fortunate too that I can add my retirement years, still have something that I looked forward to and I enjoy.
- Maya Washington: After you had the first official meeting and you became an actual group, can you tell me how you came up with the name MLK Buffs?
- Lucille Bryant Little: Well, the MLK Tennis Buffs name was decided upon during the time of Martin Luther King's death. I mean everyone in the black community, I mean throughout the world, he was a world leader that everybody had so much respect for. And we, that's why we wanted to name the organization after him. And of course the Buffs are just something that really encouraged you. To be encouraged you about. So we had the MLK Tennis Buffs at that time.
- Maya Washington: And so we are still trying to hone in on about what year that might have been. When do you think you did this?
- Lucille Bryant Little: Well, I think we just have to look up the year that he was killed.
- Maya Washington: '68. Was it around that time starting the organization? Or would you say this was years later.

Lucille Bryant Little: No, no, no. It was within a couple of years, if not that year. It wasn't more than a couple of years. It was that time.

Maya Washington: Good to know. Tell me about the programs you created for young people.

Lucille Bryant Little: Well, the program for young people started with some of the mothers who played tennis, like, Helen, you've heard of her. Helen, Joetta, myself and some of the teachers, we just decided that we would get a bunch of kids together and start teaching them tennis and mainly start with our own kids and all of us people. I just named all of us belonged to the ABC bridge club. We all knew each other. We all had kids and we just started teaching them and Ernie saw us and he encouraged us, you know, to help us. And any kids in the neighborhood who wanted to play were invited. And so Ernie has given them great instructions and all of us, the mothers being interested in encouraging our kids and they really got involved and we would give tournaments for them and taught them, you know, how to get along and be sure you shake hands after a tournament, even if you didn't win and you don't throw your racket, you don't use foul language or anything. And of course, the adults had to learn that too. We started with our own kids and it broadened.

Maya Washington: Can you tell me about the certification that you went through so that you could be an instructor?

Lucille Bryant Little: Well, my son, I guess my son Bobby, who became a very capable tennis player. I was spending so much during the winter in order for him-- he couldn't just play during the summer, and not play all winter. Winter tennis was expensive, especially from, you know, not very many people reaching the top and tennis who live in Minnesota because you have to practice all year round and it costs money. So I was paying the tennis courts, you know, X number of dollars for Bobby's lessons and I was there all the time. So Ernie suggests that I, you know, get the certification and then you can maybe get a job here. And that's what I did. And I felt complimented that Ernie thought I was, felt well enough to, you know, he thought of me enough to say that I could become. And I had been a teacher in the regular school system. So that's how I started. And I taught tennis at the Tennis Club. And in exchange they would give me free tennis time, you know, and I kept that up for quite a few years until the federal government decided that the time that they gave me, that the Tennis Club gave me, equaled out to be in money. So then they charged me, they started charging income tax.

Maya Washington: And what was the name of the club that you were teaching?

Lucille Bryant Little: The name of the club was the Lilydale Tennis Club, and that's where the Buffs would have our parties. It was an indoor tennis club. I can remember they have a swimming pool out there, weights and everything, just a recreational center. And so people who weren't playing tennis could do other things, but we would rent the tennis club. I don't remember what our dues were, but we did pay dues so that we could have our Christmas parties or our tennis parties is what I meant to say, and then we would have to go indoor, of course. And the most,

they were mostly up to Lilydale Tennis, but sometimes it would also be at the St. Paul. There was a St. Paul Tennis Club that wasn't nearly, it was very old, but we would go there sometimes to.

Maya Washington: And were those all white clubs?

Lucille Bryant Little: Yes. Until we came. Yes.

Maya Washington: Would you say Lilydale and St. Paul were white clubs until you came in?

Lucille Bryant Little: Oh, definitely. Definitely. Well, I don't know, not that many Afro-Americans who played tennis in Minnesota and I think it's, one thing is because of the cost. It was a very expensive sport. I mean, rackets are expensive. You got to get them strung. My son, he could go through a pair of tennis shoes in a week. The tennis shoes are expensive, then you got to pay for court time for them to play. So that's why I don't think there were that many black people playing in tennis. And so they were all white. I mean, and they were all over. Many times my son Bobby was old enough and his skills had developed to the point where he could play tournaments and we would go to a school to tennis courts in Minneapolis that was all white and Minnetonka. I'd have to drive him all over the place to participate in tennis. And most of the time he was the only black child there. And someone asked him one time, was he there to play tennis? He had his tennis racket on his shoulder and was carrying his bag, "You here to play tennis?" And Bobby said, "Well, there's no golf around is there?" You know, which I kinda thought that he was smart enough to answer. So that's, how they were. But not that we were prejudice against them, we just weren't at the level. Our income couldn't allow us to participate in that sport.

Maya Washington: And so why was offering free lessons important? Because of the costs?

Lucille Bryant Little: The kids could come, they didn't need balls. They didn't need tennis rackets. All they needed was a pair of tennis shoes. We didn't want them to come in sandals because of the, you know, safety. But it was free to them. I mean, tennis lessons when I first got my degree, my certification, I taught tennis to a couple and they were \$25 an hour. That was the going fee. So, you know?

Maya Washington: That's, that's expensive.

Lucille Bryant Little: Yes. It's very expensive, one of the most expensive sports. And then the, the reason we don't, as a matter of fact right today when they're designing playgrounds, they look at the capacity limit or how many people can do such a thing. Like why build a tennis court when only four people could play at a time when you can build a basketball court or a baseball field and you can have-- that's another reason it's not in the inner cities. But also sent my son, they had tennis, tennis camps for young kids. And I sent my oldest, my son Bobby, there, and it was a prize. And I felt really guilty leaving him cause it was in a weekend

camp and he was the only black child there. But [the] kids accepted him. and he had a good time.

Interview with Nina Zachary
14 September 2019, at 3055 NE Columbia Ave., Minneapolis, MN 55418

Maya Washington: Can you tell me your name?

Nina Zachary: Nina Zachary.

Maya Washington: Ms. Zachary, can you tell me your earliest memory of tennis?

Nina Zachary: Well, the earliest memory was when I was a little girl. My mother had taken tennis in school, in college, and she had one of these little rackets. And so she would take us onto a clay court, which was near our home and we would try to hit the ball. So that was the very earliest.

Maya Washington: And where was that?

Nina Zachary: That was in the state of Mississippi.

Maya Washington: And what city or community?

Nina Zachary: It was in Charleston, Mississippi.

Maya Washington: And so when you say a clay court, can you describe what a clay court is?

Nina Zachary: Oh, it actually, it had little pebbles all around. And so you were constantly afraid of falling down, but it worked pretty well. And we didn't learn much about tennis, but we had fun.

Maya Washington: So did anyone else in your community use that court? Was it just for black community members?

Nina Zachary: My parents ran a school and so we had a court in connection with the school.

Maya Washington: And was that a black school?

Nina Zachary: It was a black school.

Maya Washington: Well that seems pretty progressive that you had a court.

Nina Zachary: It actually was, but it wasn't the best court and the grass would grow and we never really had it resurfaced, but it was fun.

Maya Washington: And so how did you meet, Mr. Ernie Greene?

- Nina Zachary: Well as I said before, Joetta was the first person who had gone out to hit with Mr. Greene and then Lucille. And then I was probably about the third person. Well, I think it was Joetta who invited me to come and hit some balls because she saw me trying to hit up at Central. And so I said, "Okay, I'll go." So I went and I met Mr. Greene and he said, "You know, I think you have some promise, but" he said, "you're holding the racket all wrong." So he said, "Let me show you how to hold the racket and then we'll hit some balls." So he said, "Why don't you come to the regular sessions and I will work with you?" And I said, "Well, Mr. Greene, while it would be nice for you to work with me. I like the way I play because I can beat beginning tennis players." He said, "Oh." He said, "Well, why don't you come anyway?" So that was a start of my work with Mr. Greene.
- Maya Washington: And so when you first met him--I never have met him. So tell me as someone who's never met him, what he looked like, what his voice was like, what made him so special?
- Nina Zachary: Well, he was a very handsome, handsome man and he was very formal. In fact, he always wanted us to wear white because that was the correct attire for tennis. And he had a good personality and he possessed a good voice, well-modulated. And he was an all-around special person. And you got that feeling when you were around him. Excuse me. I have a cold.
- Maya Washington: No worries. Do you need water?
- Nina Zachary: No. I'm okay.
- Maya Washington: And so what do you think his first impressions were of you and your form as a tennis player?
- Nina Zachary: Well, I think he thought that I was enthusiastic about the game even though I didn't know much about the correct way to play, but he thought that I had some promise and he said he was willing to work with, with me, which we did for a very long time.
- Maya Washington: And so what was he like as a teacher?
- Nina Zachary: As a teacher? He was very strict and he wanted you to first of all, hold the racket just right. And he emphasized to us that we should do skills except when we were playing a game. And one of the things I remember about his insisting that we play skills. We used to have somebody watch for his car, so we would play a game until we saw him approach. Then we would start doing skills. And one of the times he said, "I don't understand why, since you people do skills all the time, why it is that, you don't play better tennis. "
- Nina Zachary: And I remarked, I said, "Mr. Greene, maybe there's something in the teaching." And he kind of looked around and looked like this. But he was a wonderful teacher and he was wanted us to do everything correctly. And the other thing, if

we won a game we might say, Mr. Greene, I'm sorry I didn't get to that ball. You know, he said, "Oh, you did just fine." If we won he would say everything was fine. If we lost, he would tell us to be on the court at eight o'clock the next day. He was very exacting and we knew what he expected of us and we never could meet up 100% to his standard. But he said, "I want you to keep trying."

- Nina Zachary: Yes, Mr. Greene was an all-around athlete when he grew up, but he was at the University working in biology and he met a Dr. Johnson who said, "You know, Ernie, I always listen and seen you as a great athlete." And he said, "Do you think you might learn how to play tennis?" And Mr. Greene said, "Well, I've never actually tried tennis." He was 42 years old, but he said, "I will go out with you." So they went out and started playing tennis and they became partners until Dr. Johnson died of cancer. And Dr. Johnson said that Ernie just caught onto tennis like a duck to water. He was a very good student and a fast learner.
- Maya Washington: And so once he started playing tennis, did he become a tennis pro?
- Nina Zachary: He became a pro and he actually was the leading, the best tennis pro in terms of recreational centers in the United States. And he was very well known in Minnesota. I think almost everybody knew about Ernie Greene.
- Maya Washington: Do you know how he got the nickname Duke?
- Nina Zachary: I actually don't know. I don't know that.
- Maya Washington: And so when you think about you and Joetta, and Lucille Bryant Little, visiting the courts and playing together mostly socially, who decided it would be a good idea to make an actual organization?
- Nina Zachary: Actually it was Mr. Greene and Esther Snipe who thought that we ought to get a constitution. And so a few of us met ,that included Mr. Greene, Esther, Lucille, and me. And so we got together one evening in Mr. Greene's home and we talked about it. But at that time I was a secretary, so I was asked to take the minutes and the notes and they asked if I would draw up from what they had said, if I would draw out a writing of what had happened. So I said that I would, but I said, "You have to tell me exactly what you want in the constitution." So we spent some time on that. In fact, we had several meetings. So then I wrote up pretty much what we had wanted and I asked Mr. Greene if that was okay. He said, "That's fine, however you did it." And so that's how we got started and we even had amendments to the constitution. So it was quite a formal way of getting started.
- Maya Washington: And so when you were putting together that constitution and talking about the purpose of the organization, what did you all see as the purpose of the MLK Tennis Buffs?

- Nina Zachary: Well, we felt that tennis was, Mr. Greene felt that tennis should be a way of life. And it wasn't just about hitting balls, it was about developing character, it was doing social things together, and it was about getting people together for a purpose. And I remember once when I was going through a divorce, Mr. Greene thought that I wasn't concentrating very well and he said, "You need to keep your eye on the ball and stop thinking of other things." And that really helped me. It helped a number of others too, as we were going through some situations, some personal situations. So it was about character, building character. And one thing that Mr. Greene emphasized, he said, "If you want to know what a person's character is, like, get them out on the tennis field and then you'll see what they are really like." I'm sorry, I have a cold.
- Maya Washington: You're doing wonderful. You're doing a great job. So how did you or the others come up with the name MLK Tennis Buffs?
- Nina Zachary: Well, we had talked about it in one of our meetings and so Mr. Greene felt that that name would be appropriate. Appropriate because we were all trying and we were not quite there yet, but he thought Buffs would be an accurate depiction of what we were trying to do. So that's how we came up—actually, Mr. Greene came up with a name and we all agreed.
- Maya Washington: And how important was Martin Luther King's name to African Americans at that time to put his name on your organization or your neighborhood street or on a building? How significant was the name of Dr. King?
- Nina Zachary: Well, we thought that Martin Luther King had actually done a lot for civil rights and not only for black people but for all people. And so because of all of the work that he did and the people who followed him, we thought it would be appropriate to have his name.
- Maya Washington: That makes sense. So tell me about the programs you all created for young people.
- Nina Zachary: Oh yes. That was exciting. Mr. Greene had an idea and he said that in the Summit-University community, we would see lots of children who were out playing, whose parents were working and couldn't afford babysitters. And the children were kind of on their own. So he thought it would be good if we started a program right in the black community, even though children of all races and colors were invited to join. So we started the program right in the middle of the Summit-University area. But as it happened, the majority of children who first came stayed long enough to get a racket and some balls. And for the most part, they didn't come back. So what we realized was most of our children were from the suburban area. And even though we enjoyed working with the children, it was not our main purpose. We wanted to get the children involved who lived in the community and who otherwise didn't seem to have a recreational place to go.

- Maya Washington: So were you able to turn that around or did you try in different ways?
- Nina Zachary: We tried. We tried in different ways. In fact, at that time the federal government had started having lunches, free lunches for everyone. So in addition to the free lunches, we brought snacks and we provided transportation. We would go around and pick up the students, but still we did not achieve what we wanted with the surrounding community. So we had a few children. In fact, one of our children was Michael Chain who became a professional player and I personally taught him how to hold the racket and Mr. Greene had spent time teaching us how to teach. And so we had a lot of fun. But in the end, the majority of children were from the suburban area.
- Maya Washington: How did those children hear about you?
- Nina Zachary: Well, mostly the parents like Lucille, Joetta. And I lived in the inner city and so I tried really hard to get children involved, but they and among their friends who lived in suburban areas wanted their children to learn tennis, so we provided transportation by parents bringing them. Lucille, Joetta and other parents would bring them to the courts.
- Maya Washington: So were any of your children involved?
- Nina Zachary: Yes. Yes. My oldest daughter happened to be available when we were having a tournament and we were having beginners grouped with an advanced player. Well, Mr. Greene's partner couldn't come, so he asked my daughter if she would like to come. Oh, she was so excited. She said, "Yes, I would like to come." Well, we played double elimination, which gave us quite a lot of tennis time. So after Mr. Greene played with my daughter, he invited her to come and work with him. She worked with him for the rest of the summer. Now she had never hit a tennis ball until Mr. Greene worked with her and she went to try out. She was at Highland High School and she went to try out for the tennis team. Well, a tennis instructor told her that he already had his team.
- Nina Zachary: So he said, "I thank you for trying out but I'm all set and so we won't be able to use you." Well, I went to the principal and I asked the principal if my daughter could try out and he said, "Certainly she can." Well, as it happened, she played first singles and so the tennis teacher came and knocked on our door and said, why didn't you tell me how good she was? And I said, well, she had only been playing for the summer working with Mr. Greene. Anyway, she became the number one singles player in St. Paul. And then she went on where she had a state rating and she played in the regions which they add to the state. She didn't win in regions, but she had a lot of fun and she did get a tennis scholarship to school.
- Maya Washington: And tell me her name and what school she ended up at.

- Nina Zachary: Elizabeth. And she ended up at Clark, but unfortunately she fell in love with a young man and she did not finish her tennis scholarship and we were sad about that. But later on she did go to college. And so now she still plays occasionally, but Maya, there's something about her, unless she feels that she can win at the game, she doesn't like to play. And Mr. Greene had always told her that eventually she would find somebody who would beat her and that did happen.
- Maya Washington: Going that extra mile was difficult for her as a person?
- Nina Zachary: It was difficult, but she learned to adjust and so now she enjoys playing with the Buffs mostly.
- Maya Washington: That's wonderful. So did you have any philosophical differences with Mr. Greene in terms of recruitment or just how the organization was run? Did you see anything differently than he saw it?
- Nina Zachary: Well, there was one thing that we disagreed on. Mr. Greene wanted to have people of good character to join the club. And I said, "Well, Mr. Greene, suppose there's somebody who wants to develop good character?" And I remember there was a young man who perhaps had not had the best reputation in the community, but I said, "Mr. Greene, he really wants to improve and he would like to become a member." Well Mr. Greene, finally he did say, "Okay, we'll give him a try." And so we did recruit that young man and he's still a part of the tennis people.
- Maya Washington: That's a great story. So you mentioned, I had it on my list of things I wanted to talk about. Cause you told me a really beautiful story about you were having a hard time during your divorce and he saw you across the court and said, "Oh, I see you've been kinda holding your head down, hold your head up." Would you be willing to elaborate on the story you mentioned, where he said to keep your eye on the ball when he saw you're going through a hard time. Would you be able to tell that story from just from your being on the court one day and him coming up to you?
- Nina Zachary: Well actually, he sensed that I wasn't concentrating on tennis, that I had something else on my mind. Now he knew that I was going through a divorce and the divorce took some time. It was longer than normal because I couldn't get my former husband to cooperate with me and with the lawyers. But anyway, Mr. Greene said, "You know, I want you to forget about the fact that you're going through a divorce. And he said, "I want you to keep your eye on the ball and concentrate on tennis. And he said that will help you." And indeed, it did help me and I was able to concentrate more on tennis and less on my personal problems.
- Maya Washington: And do you feel he had that impact on other people?

- Nina Zachary: Oh, definitely, very definitely. And he took an interest in what we were going through off the court as well as on the court. And he was a person who would give good advice and he would tell us how to get through whatever personal problems we were having.
- Maya Washington: Do you remember a time when you all were looking into buying a building?
- Nina Zachary: Yes. We had an opportunity to buy a building and it was called Phalen Tennis Center on the East part of St. Paul. And what we needed, we actually needed \$40,000 as a down payment. But unfortunately we weren't able to get enough people. We had figured if we could get eight people each to put down \$5,000, we could have put a down payment on that center. But we weren't able to get that. I think we had up to \$25,000, but we needed \$40K. So we weren't able to do that.
- Maya Washington: The \$25,000 where did that come from?
- Nina Zachary: Well, no, that came from individual people in the club and I don't think I need to name them, but we had \$5,000 from a certain doctor in the community and I can name him. That was Dr. Abrams who was a doctor to many of our families. He offered, even though he wasn't an active member, he offered to donate \$5,000 toward the \$40K that we were trying to get. But unfortunately that didn't work.
- Maya Washington: Now I feel like I've heard of Dr. Abrams and then maybe also another Hickman family in St. Paul, early St. Paul. Maybe before you were there or maybe just when you arrived. So correct me if I'm wrong, but I've heard stories where there were people in the black community who would find ways to form credit unions amongst themselves to help other community members purchase property or be able to look at real estate. Did you encounter anything?
- Nina Zachary: Yes. As a matter of fact, at our church, Pilgrim Baptist, we had a credit union where we would loan money to people to try and, you know, put down on a house. But one thing that we found out was that most people did not have the available resources to get the down payment. So in some cases we allowed them to get money from us, but sometimes it wasn't repaid and so they didn't have collateral. So we finally dissolved our credit union. And I do know that some of the other churches and several community groups tried that particular thing. And in some cases it was fairly, it worked pretty well for a while. But then there came a time when it just didn't seem feasible and so we weren't able to continue.
- Maya Washington: So what year did you come to the Twin Cities?
- Nina Zachary: I came in 1951 and I remember exactly because there had been a storm of the century, the worst storm that had ever been in Minnesota. And it was August 15th, 1951. And when we arrived at the Union Station, I thought mother had

taken us to the other side of hell. Actually it was so dreary looking. And of course the storm power lines were down. We have to be careful where we'd walk. People had to be careful where they drove. But after a while I started to get used to it and I learned to like it.

Maya Washington: And about how old were you?

Nina Zachary: I was 15 at that time.

Maya Washington: So did you finish any of your schooling in the Twin Cities?

Nina Zachary: Yes, I finished high school. I was a junior. I finished high school and I started college at the University. So I went to the University for one year. I ran out of money, then I took a secretarial course and so for a few years I was a professional secretary and then later I went back to school.

Maya Washington: And so since you were there as a young person around the time they kind of started that freeway build. Do you remember anything about building the 94 interstate?

Nina Zachary: Well of course it came, the highway was built right smack in the middle of the black community. Now there were a few white people, a few of other races who were affected, but mainly it was a black community. And as a matter of fact, one of the things that it ended was a credit union that we had started that had been started by some of the people. But that was a real shock. And another thing I remember, it was dusty, I don't care how much you clean your house. It was always dusty and it was always noisy. So we had trouble sleeping because the workers worked day and night some of the time to try to finish it. And so that was a shock. And so it caused, by bringing that freeway right down in the middle of the black community, a lot of black people started moving to suburban areas because they could not find housing in the University area.

Nina Zachary: And I know we were one of the families who moved to, oh just about a mile and a half from Summit-University. And we moved because we had two children, a boy and a girl, and we needed three bedrooms. So we did move. But when we moved to the area, some of the people who lived there objected to our moving. And of course at that time among the real estate people, there was an understanding that certain areas would be off limits to black people, to Jewish people, and to other people of color. So we had, we had a hard time, but I decided to remain in that area, which as I said, it was about a mile and a half from Summit-University and I still reside in that area.

Maya Washington: What made the Rondo neighborhood so special?

Nina Zachary: Well, for one thing, we work together as a community and of course the black churches, always a significant part of the life of black people. And when I first came to St. Paul, we used to have a yearly picnic of all the churches and we sang

together and prayed together and played together. And that was really wonderful. And then we had a community center, Hallie Q. Brown, which later became part of Martin Luther King. But we had sports events there. I know I played on a girls' basketball team. We had plays there and the plays were really almost professional. And then we had games. There was something for children, very young to older children. I mean, even in college. So we just had, we had a really good time.

Interview with Ozzie Johnson
15 September 2019, at 3055 NE Columbia Ave., Minneapolis, MN 55418

- Maya Washington: Tell me your earliest memory of tennis.
- Ozzie Johnson: My earliest memory of tennis, goes back. Oh boy. It was probably 1971-ish. About that time.
- Maya Washington: And where were you playing tennis at that time?
- Ozzie Johnson: At the University of Minnesota Fourth Street courts. That's where I kinda cut my eyeteeth in tennis, so to speak.
- Maya Washington: So what happened? Did you just drive by a court or you decided, I'm going to play? What transpired that led you to tennis?
- Ozzie Johnson: Well, yeah. What guided me to tennis? I had some spare time, so to speak, and I was looking for something to do and I saw the ad in the paper for tennis lessons that I think it was Hamline University. So I went there and took the lessons and it was kind of fun. So from there it progressed, you know, ended up playing more and paying more, and eventually one of my coworkers at the time kinda introduced me to, to the Fourth Street tennis courts. And at the time there were like 21 courts, right in Minneapolis. And the Minneapolis campus. And it was great because it's like, I got off work, I lived close to the tennis courts. I got off work and went right down there in the afternoons and play until it got dark. So it was great for me to learn because there were a lot of people, different skills and you know, different imprints and so on and so forth. And so I was able to play with different people and learn to play different kinds of games. And that's where I met a lot of my tennis friends.
- Maya Washington: And so you met one very important person there. Who did you meet that got you involved in the MLK Buffs?
- Ozzie Johnson: Yes, the one person, a very great friend Ernie "Duke" Greene. That's I guess my mentor and great guy. And he was also at the time, I think he was working at the University of Minnesota in some capacity, but he and this other fellow who was a doctor, I think he worked with a doctor in some capacity, but they were going off at three o'clock in the afternoons. And they would come down to the tennis courts. And both of them were very good. And I was this upstart young kid, right. And I thought I'd throw this old guy a thing or too. He quickly turned the tables on me and gave me the lesson. And it was a great lesson. It was a great day. It was. So I learned a lot from Ernie. Ernie Greene.
- Maya Washington: And what was your first impression of Ernie?

- Ozzie Johnson: Like I said, at the time I was probably in my late twenties and I think at the time I thought he was like in his mid-fifties. So you know with that age difference you thought that's an old guy, you can run him around. But he was so good that he ran me around. That's kind of where I got a lot of learned skills. I learned how to really play and use strategy. And so it was very good, very good learning. Very good learning.
- Maya Washington: So when did you go from the University of Minnesota courts to the MLK courts?
- Ozzie Johnson: I think it was sort of gradual, I'm not sure exactly when, from the University courts to sort of migration to the MLK. Okay. And I'm not sure if it was Ernie that introduced it. Probably was. It probably was. At a time I don't think we were MLK per se. It wasn't formed yet as a club. The courts started there with the MLK Center. And I think there were two courts there. Two courts. So that again, what was going on there was more of a social thing. You'd go down there and meet friends and just kind of, you know, play pickup games. And so that became my second home. I've been playing tennis for a long, long time. So, yeah.
- Maya Washington: What was his approach like as a teacher? Did he give you pointers once you realized this is not just some old man, this gentleman really has some skills? How did he help your game?
- Ozzie Johnson: Yeah. As far as helping my game, I don't know if he, if he necessarily gave me-- he might have given me a few pointers in the different slices and how to, you know, hold the racket and how to get speed. But I think I learned more from just playing with him because he had so much variety and so much scale that in terms of trying to even get a game off of him, you know, you learn how to defense against what he was throwing at you. So I think that was where I got the best learning and best from him. I don't think he really took much time to say, here's what you do here and this is what you do there. I think I just kind of adapted for the things and the various spins and tricks and shots and stuff like that that he was throwing at me all the time. Cause I was used to playing these still quite young bucks. Right? I would hit the ball hard, but he wasn't, he wasn't hitting the ball hard, but he had so much control, so much style and he worked you over.
- Maya Washington: And so did you encounter Tony Stingley at all?
- Ozzie Johnson: Uh, yeah. Years later. I'm not sure. It was at least maybe 20 years later. And I encountered Tony at the MLK tennis facility here. That's simply where I first met him. But that was maybe 20 years or so after I started playing, you know.
- Maya Washington: And so when the MLK Buffs were finally sort of formalized, around what year would you say that might have been?
- Speaker 2: As far as the year of when MLK was started? I got that stuff written down, but it's probably, probably in the 90s, maybe late 80s or 90s is when it started. I

don't remember exactly, but I think it was probably in the late 80s, maybe early 90s.

Maya Washington: Okay and so moving on down my list of questions, once you got involved at the MLK courts and there was the MLK Tennis Buffs, describe a typical evening or weekend, as a participant in tennis.

Ozzie Johnson: Well, as far as the MLK Tennis Buffs and playing tennis there on the courts, it's basically went down there and just sort of waited in line. You'd play. Somebody plays a set, if you lose a set, somebody else gets out of line and plays. So some people tried to monopolize the court, but that was, that was the unwritten rule. You know, you usually play the one set and if you lose, you sit down if you win you keep on playing. And then some people would give up if after a while, but if they keep winning, they might let somebody else in. But, I think that's how it was. I don't think there was any formalized orders.

Maya Washington: What was the atmosphere like?

Ozzie Johnson: Oh, very friendly and competitive. I mean it was very, very nice, relaxing and it was a place to go where you can meet friends and sometimes you play and sometimes you just, you know, just chatting and talking and getting to play some tennis.

Maya Washington: Now I recall you said the timing of your getting involved with MLK Buffs coincided with a major life transition, that you were going through a divorce. So tell me how MLK Buffs was a resource or at least an outlet at a time where your life had been changing?

Ozzie Johnson: Yeah, that was the kind of a critical time. I was going through separation, divorce, the subsoil. It came in very handy, you know, as a sort of, I don't want to say distraction, but yeah, that's what it was, to handle the situation and it was difficult when you leave your family and usually get off work, you went home and did things with the wife and kids and all of a sudden you're bacheloring it in this crummy old place, which I had, I had to go rent. So going down there to the MLK, to that environment, it really helped in the transition. You know, you get to meet people and, and socialize, so to speak. And at the same time play some competitive tennis because you know, when you play there, everyone is trying to win, you know, and to improve. And the biggest thing is, as time went on, I got better and better, you know.

Maya Washington: Did you participate in any of the tournaments or the activities where the group would travel? Do you have any experiences with that?

Ozzie Johnson: Yeah, I did. As far as experiences with the group. Yeah. I didn't do any traveling, I'll say, outside of the Twin Cities, but I played a lot of tournaments in the summertime locally and of course the MLK tournaments. And I did win a trophy or two from playing the tournament. Yeah.

- Maya Washington: And so do you have any memories of a time when you did really well in a tournament?
- Ozzie Johnson: I won a few tournaments. Singles, mostly I didn't play too much doubles. I didn't win all the tournaments but of course I won a few. But there were very good players. My biggest thing ever is I love the competition. And there were a couple of guys there that were, we were just about even, you know, so that was kind of a rivalry. Friendly rivalry. And so when we got onto the court we were very competitive. But the guys that I remember playing with were very good, and you know, it was very fair. I mean, they don't want to try and give you a bad call. You just enjoy the competition. And sometimes they'd beat you. Sometimes you get a little revenge. But it was great. I mean it was great competition and in the process I got better and better. You know, that was what it's about because I guess my psyche is I want to be good at whatever I do. And I want to exceed in whatever I do.
- Maya Washington: What were some of those opponents who you did feel were good competition?
- Ozzie Johnson: Oh, well as far as my opponents, unfortunately some of them, my very best competitors have passed away. So that's kind of...well what's it like? There's a fellow named Bridgeman, John Bridgeman, he and I were really good but equal in strategy and strength and stuff like that. And we played some excellent matches. I enjoyed playing with him. And the nice thing about it for most, not everybody, but for most of the time people, cause we never had [inaudible] people calling it. They either call you on in and out and stuff like that. And there are some players that are very good. And then some people, they weren't so good, but a guy like John Bridgeman, that was excellent. I mean, I enjoyed playing him every time I played him. We didn't have a problem ever. We just, we fought tooth and nail, but we had a good time.
- Maya Washington: Did you get your kids involved in tennis?
- Ozzie Johnson: I have two sons and a daughter and I tried to get them involved with that. My oldest son, he didn't really take to tennis. My younger son, he took tennis quite a bit better and even today. So we were good tennis buddies. And in addition to that, we took up golfing too. So he's my golfing buddy, even when I get a chance to visit him.
- Maya Washington: What do you think about some of the young African American, women in particular, that's our best example right now, making waves in tennis now? Knowing how different things were?
- Ozzie Johnson: It's really frustrating as far as on the professional level and African Americans. We didn't have a whole lot-- Arthur Ashe, of course comes to mind in terms of men. Women, I can't think of any right off the bat, but it's greater than, in terms of the previous years. Of course we got Coco right now I leading the way. But it was great. It's, you know, it's always good to see somebody African American

come up and do well in that cause the odds are so much stacked against you. I mean some of these kids of means, they get off school and go to country clubs. And they've got the best courts, they've got the clay courts. They got, you know, they've got the whole works there. So really they have no excuse not to exceed. For African Americans who most likely weren't part of the country club crowd probably were brought up on the city courts. That's a different situation. It's a different situation. But, you know? And I can't speak for all of the players. I think Arthur Ashe probably did some of his maybe got some of his tennis skills in the service. I don't know that I remember the history of it, but still, you know, Althea Gibson, most people didn't have country clubs. Venus and Serena, they grew up in the mean courts, the concrete courts of Compton, you know, as opposed to the country club's clay courts. But we find a way to prevail.

Maya Washington: So thinking about your career at that time, all the time you were developing as a tennis player, what was your profession during the time you were involved with the MLK Buffs in its heyday?

Ozzie Johnson: Yeah, well, my profession, it was in computer and computer science development and operating system development. I've got an engineering degree, electrical engineering degree and that got me from the University of Minnesota. I did graduate work at the University Minnesota. I actually went to University of Iowa to get my undergraduate degree. And so I started to work at the Unisys and started working in the development of the communications system. Basically what it was, it was a system that allowed computers to talk among each other. So you had the computer at one end and another one and there was this communication box, if you will, that allowed them to talk between each other. So one of my first assignments was in working and developing and testing that. And over the years that migrated from the harvest site into the actual software, writing the programs.

Ozzie Johnson: There are lower level problems and there are high level problems. The low level problem is a program written in the, in the actual machine instructions. So you have to know the actual base level instructions and you write in, you know, each instruction to tell the computer exactly what to do, how to multiply, how to divide and so on and so forth. So that's one level of programming. The next level is what'd you call the upper level, the higher level languages, which eliminates, hides, the hardware infrastructure and architecture from the, from coder. They don't need to know how the computer does what it does. So the high level language is developed and you know, you've got the Cobal, Fortran-- there's a whole bunch of other languages. You write in that language, and then there's a intermediary language compiler that takes that high level language and converts it to the language that the computer understands. And so this totally separates the programmer who can be anybody that, you know, they don't need to know the internal hardware infrastructure. But that intermediate layer, it converts that high level language, the language that the computer understands. And that works for anything, any computer, that's the basics of any mainframe computer system.

- Maya Washington: How many African American, actually you're Guyanese American...how many black men or women did you encounter in your field?
- Ozzie Johnson: In terms of my field at a time, no, not that many. One of the mentors I had from tennis, Max Johnson. He's deceased now. He was not a programmer. He was one of the hardware developers, very talented that guy. He had a knack for all kinds of stuff, but he too at the time, you never got, you know, we had that, that ceiling. So there weren't that many. But over the years there were few, very few, other African Americans who got into this operating system and compilers and stuff like that. But even today is still very, very few and it's very, very lucrative. And to me, I enjoy that kind of stuff. I mean, that was something that after many years, I got into the management part of it and I kind of washed my hands of them.
- Maya Washington: What are the modern technologies that we have today that we should be thanking you and other engineers of your era for? What work that you were doing led to technologies we encounter every day?
- Ozzie Johnson: I think as far as technology encounter is more like when you go to the airlines, you walk up, there you go buy your tickets and you get checked in. Well, there is a computer operating behind the scenes. My company, my former company, or other companies that systems are operating anything--airlines, you go to the store, everything is running on a computer. Behind that is the operating system of some kind. And basically again it's designed. Operating systems are designed to isolate the end user from having to know anything about the internal workings of it. They don't care how the computer multiplies and divides. All they want to know is to say, "I want to buy this many widgets at this price. Tell me what the total cost and what the interest rate is," et cetera, et cetera. When you go to check in at the airline counter, the attendants don't care what's running the computers at all. All they need to know is to check you in. Check you in, check your bag. But behind that, there's a lot of software just chugging away. And the nice thing about it, the operating system is that allows many people to use the facilities. And the reason for that, is the way that all works is because the logic system, the electronics behind that, these things are operating at the speed of light. And so the switching that occurs allows the machine to operate, operate at such a fantastic speed that for humans, whatever we do, the computer can do a million of those operations in a second. So to the people in the external operating, everything looks like you hit a button and boom, you get a response. But at that time, you, that millisecond that you get it is, it has done a number of other operations and addressed and handled other numbers. Numbers of other requests. So that's the beauty of the way computers work.
- Maya Washington: So how does it feel knowing you were a pioneer in advancing that technology?
- Ozzie Johnson: Well, it's funny as far as pioneer, pioneer is probably a little bit, a little bit too much, but, in terms of developing it and operating and understanding it and managing people who are involved in furthering that software, I think that's been pretty nice. That's been pretty good.

- Maya Washington: And what years were you part of that field or working?
- Ozzie Johnson: Well, I started when I got out of college in '67 and I worked in the industry for almost 50 years and I retired four years ago.
- Maya Washington: So tell me about growing up in Guyana, correct?
- Ozzie Johnson: Yes.
- Maya Washington: So could you say where you grew up and what it was like for you as a young child?
- Ozzie Johnson: I grew up in Guyana. Back then it was called British Guyana. Yeah. It was a British colony and so the schools and stuff were very good in a sense. In the sense that the teachers will be local and the teachers are all typically part of the same village. And so there was a special interest in everybody, all the kids, you know. And back then the teachers and the parents were in cahoots, quote, unquote. In other words, when we went to school, we didn't have the privilege of talking back to our teachers. We got spanked. And we didn't go home--we dare not go home and tell our parents, "Hey, teacher spanked me today." Cause you get spanked again. So there was a common understanding, a bond, in terms of nobody sued the teachers and whatnot.
- Ozzie Johnson: And teachers didn't brutalize you. I mean, you get spanked. But what it did, it made us focus and then, you know, the different families are different. But my mother, she was the one that kept drumming into us, "Get the paper." That was her. She didn't have to say much other than that. Get the paper, get the paper. I heard, thousands of times growing up, you know, "Get the paper." And so after a while you get to be teenage and just say, "Oh, get the paper. Okay. Okay." And so that's what drove me into getting to higher education and going to university and you know, graduate school and stuff like that. So the community was very focused cause we were poor, very poor communities. I mean, our houses were wooden houses and the woods were rotting. The rats were running in and out. It wasn't, it wasn't, you know, a fancy hotel or fancy suburban thing.
- Ozzie Johnson: We didn't have running water. When we were growing up, we had wells that you go fetch the water a mile away. So that was the kind of environment I grew up in. And so I am very proud of my parents. Both my mom and dad. My mom in particular because she got us, all of my sisters and brothers, they're professional people, out of a very, very poor environment. But I think that we, we made this transition because she focused on education. And the interesting thing about it, she never went to, she never finished high school because for whatever reason, her mom died or whatever. But I think she had a vision and she understood that if you want to get out of wherever you are, you've to get a good education. And she did all she could.

- Maya Washington: So under British rule, did you have a sense of racial discrimination or a class structure that did have racial undertones?
- Ozzie Johnson: Yeah, yes. As far as the British rule, as a British colony at the time, all the people in government, were from, the white folks from England and they came and they had this really nice college that they built. There was a boy's college, and the girl's college. And of course the boy's college was named Queens college. And the girls was called [inaudible] school or whatever. And so the Queens, as far as the boys college was concerned, I eventually went there. They have local folks that had to compete. There were fees there, but there wasn't really much fees because all their administrators' kids, they went there all the way. But the locals got admission by competing, by getting scholarships. You'd take annually or semiannually examinations. And you go take these exams and based on your, your results, you know, if you were top of the class or you getting real high grades, then you were, you might be eligible to get the scholarship. I got, well actually got a scholarship before that, I got a similar thing. I got a scholarship to the privately run secondary school and from there I was able to compete and take an exam, and the exam to get into Queens college. So it was kind of a two-step process, but basically everything was based on competition and your achievements, in terms of the courses that you were taking, stuff like that.
- Maya Washington: That makes sense, why you like tennis.
- Ozzie Johnson: Well it's a competition. You know, you want to get better. You want to get better. It's a driving force that you play and play fairly.
- Maya Washington: So how did, since you were somewhat aware of a racial or economic structure growing up, when you came to the US for college and then later in your career, what was it like to adjust to American politics and American race relations?
- Ozzie Johnson: So it was, you know, in my work environment, it started out the people there weren't exactly, didn't exactly welcome me with open arms, but they weren't outwardly hostile either. But I tell you one thing, even in the men's room the graffiti on the walls in the bathroom was so horrible. Said horrible, horrible things, you know, these scrawlings say this and that. And then the people, some of the people were very, very cold. And it never, it was never an outright insult or anything like that, but people would see you walking down the hall and they'll duck or hide or, if you say hi to them, they wouldn't respond. But you know what, over the years, there's a lot of people walking down the aisles and they see me they quick go the next way or someone will pass me and I will say "hi." And no response. And you know what? I kept it up. And eventually over the years-- it took a long time, some cases, but after a number of years they started talking to me and, and then I got promoted in different levels. But it was, it wasn't a hostile environment physically or even emotionally, but it was just the fact that they were, it was just unbelievable maybe some of these people never grew up with black folks in their community, I don't know. But it took them awhile before they, even, some of them even talked to me. And by the time I

left there, I was pretty well respected and didn't have that problem after a few years. But you know, so it took a while though.

- Maya Washington: The graffiti, can you describe what it said?
- Ozzie Johnson: Oh, you know the N word. Oh yeah. The typical N word. And it was nasty stuff like that, you know.
- Maya Washington: It would just be written on a bathroom stall?
- Ozzie Johnson: Oh in the stall, you know, stalls, you know. I don't know, permanent ink, with a knife or whatever. Just things in the bathroom. Nazi symbols and stuff like that, you know. So it wasn't, it was stuff that you saw, but you let it run off your back.
- Maya Washington: In a corporate environment?
- Ozzie Johnson: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. I mean, it's interesting. I'm not sure exactly, well this is back, I'm talking back in 1967 when I first started there. But I must say maybe, I don't know. I don't know what was the turning point? It's probably maybe in the 80s, maybe. They would go on, you know, from time to time, they would repaint over the stuff and try to fix it up. But yeah, it seemed like that pretty much stopped or eventually, you know, fortunately none of that by 10, 15 years after, there was not, there wasn't any of that anymore. But when I first started working there, it was, it was kinda bad. But I let the stuff run off the back, you know.
- Maya Washington: So when did you get more involved in the Buffs as like a board member and what are some of the positions you've held?
- Ozzie Johnson: Well yeah, actually I think as a board, MLK is the Buffs and stuff, I believe, I don't remember the exact year, but it was actually formed into the MLK Tennis Buffs. We had a few of us. Mr. Greene, Lucille, Joetta McAdams, myself and I think there might be one other person. I remember having a, a meeting, I think it was at Joetta's house. We had a meeting, we get together, we'll start talking, about forming this MLK Tennis Buffs. Lucille's. It might have been Lucille's house or Joetta's. Anyway, so we met a few times and out of that we decided to start this MLK Tennis Buffs and that's kinda what it was. It started with the idea of Ernie Greene, Lucille, a couple of us, and we just started the Buffs and again I don't remember the exact year. But that was the genesis of the MLK Tennis Buffs. It was formed so we could get together to play. And at the time, I believe it was rather than a time when they were beginning to have indoor tennis, winter indoor tennis facilities. So that worked pretty nice.
- Maya Washington: And how did you come up with a name?
- Ozzie Johnson: I don't remember exactly how we came up with the Martin Luther King. Cause he was assassinated in what, 1968? It may have been part of the outcome of

that. I don't remember the exact reason why it was. It might've been just because he was there, very prominent black leader. I don't remember if there was a link between his assassination. Because I think the club, the club may have started before that happened.

Maya Washington: You're so much younger than everyone. What was sort of your role? Did you just kind of do what the elders said or did you try to share ideas as a young person to get other young people involved?

Ozzie Johnson: Yeah. I wasn't really that young. I was a junior between, you know.

Maya Washington: I will restate the question again. What was it like being so much younger than some of the others who helped?

Ozzie Johnson: Oh, the age didn't even come into play for me. I was just interested in contributing and forming the organization where we can play. And never having the opportunity to get into some of the clubs. So the age factor never came to me because, like I said with Mr. Greene, I learned real quick. That he was at least 20 years or so, more than I was. And so I learned real quick that just because somebody's 20 years older, doesn't mean that can't go on a certain scale. So that's a life lesson I learned.

Maya Washington: Okay. Did you have a chance to work with any of the youth programs? I believe you're involved in working with the youth?

Ozzie Johnson: Yes, I have. I've been involved with providing tennis lessons in the past 10 years. But even before then, you know, part of what we did, at the MLK Tennis and actually, I think Lucille Bryant Little and I started, and a couple of people started giving lessons from way back at the MLK courts. I don't remember the years, but it's probably maybe in the 90s, it's already 2000s. So we used to have Saturday morning tennis lessons and I have a whole bunch of kids come out and taught them how to play. And that went on for a number of years. So she and I basically primarily Lucille Bryant Little and I were involved with the lessons part of it, you know. And, you know, as time progressed, she's no longer participating in lessons, but we've carried on with a new group, you know, Tyrone Terrill, some of the other people that have, you've probably interviewed. We've been providing tennis lesson now for the last maybe 10, 12 years on a weekly basis out at the MLK tennis courts. So yeah, the tennis lessons thing kind of progressed from one stage when we had Lucille and Mr. Greene and some of those people, and then now it's focused on the next generation of kids if you will.

Maya Washington: Is there a charge to participate?

Ozzie Johnson: No, no, this is all our giving back. No, we don't charge anybody for it. You know, I just love to teach the kids and see them improve. And it's great to see when they learn things, you know, the struggle to do things. You know, you struggle

and all of a sudden the light bulb goes on and things click in and that's, that's really I think gives you a little kick. You see all of what people learn. Kids learn and get better. You watch them get better, you know?

Maya Washington: So what's the best advice you'd give someone who wanted to teach children? What are sort of your best practices when you're working?

Ozzie Johnson: Well, yeah. Well I'm not, I'm not the best, but you have to develop a little rapport with them because they will test you. They will push you and test you. So you have to develop that rapport, a forum, to get your point across and to be, to be able to have control of this because it can get out of here real quick. So it's also a combination of discipline. And at the same time, you know, high fives when they do something good type of thing. You know. So it's a very interesting thing working with kids cause they will push you and challenge you, wherever they can. But it's always so exciting to see a game and a particular thing you're trying to teach them, kicks in and they get the hang of it. And so that's gratifying to me. And I'm sure to the other teachers that deal with the kids and even adults do.

Maya Washington: And how can tennis have a positive impact on a person's life? What are the lessons that tennis offers people that can help them in their life?

Ozzie Johnson: Yeah. Well tennis. Oh, the skills and things that tennis offers, you know, physical fitness, competition, honesty, integrity. Those are things that, because we have played with some guys over the years that, I mean, and some of them have got reputations for giving bad calls. Oh that everybody says, oh wow. So, you know, the thing that I want to focus on is integrity, fairness, you know, and if you want to win, you gotta win fairly. You gotta, you usually don't do that on a hand thing and bad calls. Obviously some calls, people are, sometimes it's not intentional because sometimes it depends on your perspective, where you're at, and the physicality of it, you know, depending on where you're are, it might appear to be in, simply because of mechanics and the physics over there, the qualities of light and how all that works. But then there's people who are clearly, and then some people have a reputation. Same with the guys we've played with at MLK. You don't want to play with that guy. If you do, look out, he's going to be calling bad calls. And there are a few people like that. But for the most part, people are very, very honest. You know, I just try to be.

Maya Washington: From the scientist perspective, how would you describe, tennis from a scientific standpoint? I've heard a few of you talk about it being a geometric game. Do you have any insights on how you would apply science to tennis?

Ozzie Johnson: Approaching it from that point of view, you can find a lot of scientific applications, things that guide the flight of the ball. For instance, how do you impart spin? How do you increase the speed that you can generate when you hit the ball? So those are things that are sometimes intuitive, but for people have a little sense of the mechanics of motion, for instance, and aerodynamics properties. It helps to have that in your hip pocket because then you understand

a bit more of how can you impart spin, for instance, to affect a certain result. For the most part, people don't have that kind of a technical background. They just hit the ball and you know, sometimes it works that way. Because the mere fact that we are hitting it. Sometimes you don't intentionally intend to impart spin. But just the mechanics, again going back to the mechanics of motion, you know, it depends on, depending on where the racket, the point of contact with the racket and ball, it can do things that you didn't plan on doing, but that was the end result in some cases when you, if you're, if you have that intuition, that technical skill, you can deliberately try to effect that kind of a change and that kind of outcome.

Maya Washington: Was there any other thing that I missed that you feel is important to say?

Ozzie Johnson: Just that, just over the years I just got to say, you know, it's been a really good life journey for me to be associated with MLK Tennis Buffs. And to be a part of it and watch it grow and do various things. And the, the kinds of contributions that the Tennis Buffs, and again, giving credit to the people that initiated it. Mr. Greene and Lucille Bryant Little, you know some of the other names that's escaping right now. Joetta McAdams, and a number of people played tennis that helped make the Tennis Buffs. So it's been a great, great experience for me, so, yup. You're welcome.

Interview with Sondra Hickman
15 September 2019, at 3055 NE Columbia Ave., Minneapolis, MN 55418

- Maya Washington: So tell me your name.
- Sondra Hickman: My name is Sondra Hickman.
- Maya Washington: Tell me your earliest memory of tennis.
- Sondra Hickman: Oh, I guess watching my mother go off to play tennis. She played tennis with our Reverend Moore. They played mixed doubles together and I think that's my earliest memory of it. I used to pick up her tennis racket and swing it around, but I didn't really play it that time.
- Maya Washington: And tell me about the community where you grew up. What city and state was this in?
- Sondra Hickman: I was in Saint Paul, Minnesota, right in the heart of the city on St. Anthony Avenue with Rondo facing on the back side. And everybody knew everybody. So you didn't get into too much trouble cause somebody would tell you to stop or tell your parents about it. It was just a normal quiet community.
- Maya Washington: When did you meet Mr. Greene or become introduced to the MLK Tennis Buffs as an organization?
- Sondra Hickman: Oh, let's see. That was, Oh, probably in the seventies, late seventies, early eighties. I went down to the tennis courts because I heard there were people down there playing that you could just walk on and play with. So I went down there and I saw it and I thought, "Oh, this is great." You know, there's a lot of people sitting around waiting to play. And I knew some of them and got to know some of them. And then I met Ernie and fell in love with him. And also I met Esther Snypes, fell in love with her, and she kind of taught me a lot. And I used to follow her around all the time to her tournaments and we became good friends and she worked with me.
- Maya Washington: I never met the Snypes. So could you describe her for me in a way that would make me feel like I knew her too?
- Sondra Hickman: Well, she was short. She wore her hair in a natural. She was soft spoken and quiet at times and very strong personality, very strong person and very kind and giving if you needed something, she'd be there for you. I asked her to teach me how to play tennis seriously and she told me no because she thought I was just down there to see the guys and hang around with them instead of learning. I kept telling her over and over, no, this is what I really want to do. And she worked with me and taught me things and like I said, I would follow her around

to her tournaments and watch her play. And she was just a wonderful person. She lived in Minneapolis and she took the bus over wherever she went. She took the bus and a lot of times she would come to St. Paul when I didn't feel well and bring me soup or salad or something to eat or just to come visit. She was a mother of two sons and she was just an excellent tennis player.

- Maya Washington: And so in terms of the age difference, was she more of a friend, big sister, or more like a mother?
- Sondra Hickman: She was a friend. I never knew how old she was. She was much older, but she never would tell me how old she was. I almost got it out of her once. I was talking about something. I said, "Well, Esther, when was that?" And she almost told me, and then she stopped. She says, "You're just trying to figure out how old I am." So she was a friend more than anything. She was a mentor and she was a friend.
- Maya Washington: And so between the time that you picked up your mother's tennis racket as a child and actually decided to take tennis lessons, did you have any, tennis experiences between that time?
- Sondra Hickman: Yeah, I would go out with a friend, you know. You're talking about people that don't know what they're doing. We'd go to a tennis court and we'd spend most of our time chasing the balls because we hit it here and there instead of hitting it to each other. So that's basically what I did until I decided I wanted to learn. I wanted to be able to play with the people that were at MLK playing.
- Maya Washington: And so what were either Mr. Greene or Ms. Snypes' impressions of you as a player when you were sort of new?
- Sondra Hickman: Well, I'm not sure what they thought of me. I guess Esther saw more potential in my ability than I did. She entered me or had me entered into a lot of tournaments when I felt like I shouldn't have been there, but she thought it was a good experience for me to get out and do that. So I'm not really sure what Ernie thought of my tennis abilities.
- Maya Washington: Tell me about your career at the time and how you would go from work then to the courts, and then spend the weekends there and that sort of thing. Can you talk about sort of the turning points in your life where tennis really became a godsend or a really important part of your life because you were playing almost every day?
- Sondra Hickman: Well, after a while, after going down to MLK and getting to know a lot of the people there and having such a great time, I was working as a secretary at the time and then I started working as a lab technician at 3M and then later Imation. Rather at the time I lived out on Western and the courts were there on Marshall and Mackubin. So I would just go from work and put my clothes in the car and go to the tennis court and change clothes there and play until dark. And

then I'd go home. I didn't have any kids or pets to worry about. So that was my life and it got to be a habit and then a strong desire to do better. And then like I said, I started playing in tournaments around the city over in Minneapolis. And then we would travel to South Dakota and different states to play. And I was pretty well hooked by then.

Maya Washington: And tell me about the atmosphere at the courts after work or on a Saturday and Sunday. Give me a sense of who was there, how many people were there? Were you only playing tennis or were there other activities?

Sondra Hickman: No, we were basically playing tennis unless it was a holiday and then we'd grill and we were still playing tennis while somebody was off grilling. And it was like a little community. I felt totally at home with them. We were there early in the morning for those that were early risers until people started arriving at different times of the day. And afterwards we'd just sit and talk. Maybe someone would bring a couple of beers or else someone will run off and get some food and we'd sit and eat and talk. And the only time we went home early is if it started to rain, or if it rained that day then we didn't go down there. We drive past there to be sure nobody else was there, but sometimes somebody would be there cleaning off the courts. Like Tony Stingley. And I lived [there] after a while, I moved kitty corner from the court. So all I had to do was look out my window to see if there were cars there and then I would be over there.

Maya Washington: I don't recall if it was you or someone else told me that sometimes there'd be card games going or that people who would come, come on the weekends? Some people would be playing while others would just be around to socialize.

Sondra Hickman: Well, what would happen is, I don't remember card games being played. That could have been when we were having a picnic or something. But they had four benches, two on each side of the courts. And you'd come and you'd sit and there'd be someone playing and it was usually the loser got off the court and the next person in line would go play. And that's how it was. You know, you came in and you sat and talked and waited for your turn to play.

Maya Washington: Tell me about some of the trash talking that would take place back then.

Sondra Hickman: Well, well, you know, you always tease somebody who's played if they miss a shot or something, especially the better players, you know, we razed them. "Oh God, Tony, you missed that shot," "What was he thinking?" We would do that. And of course you had to remember that you would be up there playing sometime but we did that a lot. It was all done in fun.

Maya Washington: Did you ever get any of the comments?

Sondra Hickman: Oh yes. You didn't play without getting it. Like I said, if you missed your shot or if you made a really good shot on somebody, there was comments going back and forth.

- Maya Washington: So going back to the tournaments. Was Ms. Snypes responsible for setting that up?
- Sondra Hickman: Well, there was always a book or tournaments posted that, you know, people, anybody could enter and you know, she was so into tournaments and things that, she would tell me when there's a tournament and say, "Get an application." Say, "Let's get in this." And also once a year, she belonged to a club in Des Moines, Iowa, the Hilltop Tournament group. And they had a tournament every year. And every year she'd set that up. She'd go back to Des Moines and get everything ready because most of the people in the group had passed away. They were all older people and they had recruited some younger people into the group too, but she kind of ran things when she was down there. And I'd go stay at her niece's house or in a hotel and most of the time at her niece's house, and we'd play tennis there and tournament and sit around and talk and go back. And then when the tournament was over, we'd usually, we were lucky enough, some of us from St. Paul, John Cook, Sam King, Bill McIntyre, who else? We'd go down there and then usually we'd get to the finals. So we were usually there in some capacity and drive back to St. Paul on the weekend that Sunday. So it was fun. And Ernie was there. Sometimes he was there. We had our largest contingency from St. Paul. I don't even remember what year it was, but Ernie was there. Sam and Ernestine King, Bill McIntyre, and myself, and John Cook. I'm not sure how many more, but that was a good one.
- Maya Washington: And so with so many African Americans from the St. Paul community participating in the MLK Tennis Buffs, what were some of the professions represented among your membership? What were some of their professional lives outside of tennis? Do you have a sense of the types of jobs some of your members had?
- Sondra Hickman: Well, I know Bill worked at 3M. I'm not really sure what his title was. Tony Stingley worked for the USTA. His wife, she had something to do with nursing or helping, I'm not sure what their titles were. I know there was a few of us that worked at 3M at the time. I'm not really sure of their titles. We didn't worry about titles or anything. We were just out there for the fun of it.
- Maya Washington: So tell me about some of the tennis parties in the winter or in the summer months? What do you remember about the parties?
- Sondra Hickman: Well, the parties were fun. It was more of us getting together as we did outside. Only inside. There was always food and something to drink, pop or water or whatever. And when you're sitting and waiting for a court to open, you're sitting and talking and laughing at some of the people that are playing. And so it was just an extension of being outside.
- Maya Washington: And so what was your experience participating in tournaments? Was it something that you enjoyed and did you see yourself as a really competitive player? How would you describe yourself?

- Sondra Hickman: Well, at first I didn't enjoy it. Like I said, I kept telling Esther that I shouldn't be there, that I wasn't ready. But I suffered through it. I enjoyed some of them. Some of them I got beat right away. Others I didn't. I also played in the league at 3M where I played against the men and the women and I enjoyed that. I'm proud to say that in the league that I was in, the 3M league, that I was only beaten by one woman. And that was after I had torn my rotator cuff and I was just getting back into playing. And when I played her again, I beat her again. And that's my crowning glory that none of the women beat me. A couple of the men did. But I beat a few of them too. And then in the tournaments I got to the finals in the mixed doubles in the ATA tournament in new Orleans with Bill McIntyre and totally choked. I mean it was so bad I could barely hold my racket and I got to the finals in that and I got close in some of the singles. So those were, you know, I did enjoy it later after I felt like I could be competitive.
- Maya Washington: And new Orleans? Do you remember what year that was?
- Sondra Hickman: No, I don't.
- Maya Washington: Do you remember who was president during that time? Could you guess?
- Sondra Hickman: I just don't remember. I'm not good with dates and years and whatnot. I just don't remember.
- Maya Washington: So what is your future vision for the Buffs? What would you like to see happen for the Buffs?
- Sondra Hickman: Well, I'm not really sure because I haven't been very active with them, but I would like to see it continue to grow and to bring more youth into it maybe so that it always continues to blossom and flourish. And there's always kids out there that need to learn how to play and to see them out. Working with the community and bringing kids. And I know there are a lot of summer programs for kids. I'm always seeing kids out on courts with people, but I'd like to be sure that the Buffs continue that program.
- Maya Washington: What is it like as a black woman, who was probably one of few when you played in and against, non-black tennis players or being part of a black tennis organization? What is it like to see young black women excelling in tennis the way that we're seeing on a national and global scale right now?
- Sondra Hickman: Oh, it's great. I just wish there were more out there. I know it's hard and you need sponsorship, but I enjoy watching these young blacks on TV and I just hope they continue to blossom like that and we can get some more men and young women out there.
- Maya Washington: So now I want to ask you just some questions about your family background and growing up, you know, in the Twin Cities and in St. Paul. So when did your family

come to the Twin Cities or just St. Paul? How many generations back? Your mother was here, but were grandparents here as well?

Sondra Hickman: My grandparents. My grandmother died, my grandfather lived here, but I was just a baby at the time, so I really didn't know him, but my mother had moved here with her sister and as far as I can remember, we always lived here. They were here. They were from Fort Scott, Kansas originally. But, I don't even know when they moved here.

Maya Washington: So tell me what growing up in St. Paul was like, what was the black community like in the Rondo area at that time as a small child?

Sondra Hickman: Well, it was like any other black neighborhood. Generally you felt good and safe in it. You could do what you wanted to do, run to somebody's house and not worry about it. It was just a community like any other community, I believe.

Maya Washington: What social activities was your mom involved in?

Sondra Hickman: My mother was a social butterfly. She was in the Cameos and other little social groups and she was always going to a meeting or a party. I remember watching her get dressed up in her formals and her beautiful dresses to go to this dance or formal or whatnot.

Maya Washington: Can you tell me about the Cameos?

Sondra Hickman: It was a group of men and women, I believe. And I think I have a picture of my mother in the group. I'm not sure. It was just a social club.

Maya Washington: And could you spell it?

Sondra Hickman: C.A M E.O.

Maya Washington: Okay, cool. Do you recall or did your mother share with you what happened when they built the freeway?

Sondra Hickman: Well, it basically took our house and she just told us that we were going to have to move because they were putting in a freeway and she was upset about it, but she didn't talk that much to us about it. We were, I was fairly young and what it did was it split up our family because my mother and father, stepfather and brother, youngest brother went to live with family friends and my two sisters and my nephew and I went to stay with a cousin. And that happened. We were like that for several months until my mother found another duplex and they bought that and we moved back in together as a family. But I don't recall her talking too much about it. I know she wasn't happy that, you know, they were taking our housing property and it was breaking up the community.

- Maya Washington: Now as a small black child, did you have a sense of there being a racial motivation or any understanding of life outside of the black community?
- Sondra Hickman: Not then really.
- Maya Washington: So it sounds like they did a really good job of incubating you.
- Sondra Hickman: Well like I said, we had our little neighborhood and as a kid I pretty much stayed in it and that was it. We'd go to Kansas city to visit my aunts and I remember we were going to a movie with some people that lived across the street, young people, and I was going down in the first floor and they grabbed me and say, "No, you can't do that. What's the matter with you?" And I looked at him like, What? They said, "Well you have to go up to the balcony." And I thought, "Hmm, okay?" Cause here we didn't have to do that. But in Kansas we had to. And then I started noticing little things that we shouldn't or couldn't do.
- Maya Washington: I recall you told me a story about you moved and some people threw trash on your lawn.
- Sondra Hickman: When we bought our duplex on Dayton and Fisk, someone was constantly throwing trash on our Boulevard and there was a German shepherd that would come and get that trash and drag it back off. So I figured it was his owners dumping their trash there. Otherwise, I don't know why he would come and drag the trash away.
- Maya Washington: And why do you think they were dropping the trash at your house?
- Sondra Hickman: Because we were black and it was basically a white neighborhood and they probably didn't want us there.
- Maya Washington: So what if anything, did your mother or her family members teach you about how to deal with racism and discrimination? Did they-- was it something you talked about and had strategies for or you just observed what adults did?
- Sondra Hickman: Well, she used to tell us, one of her favorite sayings was "Every knock is a boost" and she just tried to tell us what was going on in the world and how people were being treated and how we should conduct and carry ourselves.
- Maya Washington: I remember you shared with me that you have a famous photographer in your family. Could you tell me a little bit about that family member?
- Sondra Hickman: Yeah. His name is Gordon Parks. He's no longer with us. My mother's youngest brother. And he used to come and visit us all the time and I didn't care for him at first because he was never around. And then, I don't remember how old I was, but he came and we sat and talked and I fell in love with him. I got to know him and just totally fell in love with him.

- Maya Washington: And so did he also live in St. Paul?
- Sondra Hickman: No, he was visiting. He lived in New York at the time.
- Maya Washington: And so did he ever, did you all ever talk about race or tennis or the arts?
- Sondra Hickman: We talked about tennis because he was a tennis player and I remember he was here one year and we were having a picnic and we were out at Como Park and he wanted to play tennis and it was hot. And I said, "Well, it's kinda hot Uncle Gordon." He says, "Oh, come on." And I had a pretty good serve and I think he thought he was, he's just gonna beat me off the court. And he didn't. And he had me keep serving to him and he was sweating. And I kept saying, "I'm getting tired," you know, "I want to stop." And he says, "Oh, just a few more." And then when we got through and everybody looked at how sweaty he was and tired, they all jumped on me for doing that to him. And it's like I tried to stop, I didn't want to play, but he wanted to. But we didn't talk much about tennis after that. We never played again either .
- Maya Washington: Because you wore him out so bad.
- Sondra Hickman: Well, we never really had a chance to. Like I said, we were having a picnic, so we played. But otherwise when he came, he was usually busy. There was an opening at the Science Museum displaying his works. And so we never really got a chance to spend a lot of time together cause when he was in town everybody wanted a piece of his time. So we didn't get that much of his time.
- Maya Washington: Now did you have any other family members who played tennis? Nieces? Nephews?
- Sondra Hickman: Yeah, my brother used to play. I have a niece who took lessons and used to play. I have a nephew who tried to play, but none of them were really into it like I was.
- Maya Washington: So, I got through, I think most of my questions. Is there anything that maybe I didn't ask you that you think is important? Or that you'd like to say about the MLK Tennis Buffs or about living in St. Paul, or about your life?
- Sondra Hickman: Not really. The Buffs was a good organization to belong to. Like I said, it was a little family community. And it kept, we had white people in it too, so it wasn't just exclusively for blacks, but it was a good organization at that time. It's changed a lot because we've lost a lot of people who were there at the beginning, and it was just a good organization to belong to. And I hope it continues to flourish. Like I said, I haven't been part of it for a while, but I hope it grows and continues to flourish.

Interview with Vanne Owens Hayes
15 September 2019, at 3055 NE Columbia Ave., Minneapolis, MN 55418

- Maya Washington: Please tell me your name.
- Vanne Owens Hayes: My name is Vanne Owens Hayes.
- Maya Washington: And Ms. Hayes, will you tell me your earliest memory of tennis?
- Vanne Owens Hayes: My earliest memory of tennis is really kind of funny. I have a friend who was always getting into exercise programs. So we took an adult education, tennis, and I, I don't know why I stayed with it cause I was very frustrated. I couldn't make eye contact with the ball. You know, but I stuck with it and then I saw other people playing. I was an adult with children when I started playing. I had never thought about it, but, my husband and I were, you know, exercising. I was riding bicycles everywhere and I thought I'll try it.
- Maya Washington: And who was the friend that got you involved?
- Vanne Owens Hayes: Mary Boyd.
- Maya Washington: And where were you playing at that time?
- Vanne Owens Hayes: At Central High School. In the gym, I think.
- Maya Washington: And have you, has your family, always lived in St. Paul?
- Vanne Owens Hayes: My family, the family of my birth lived in St. Paul from the time I was born. And then when I was married I lived in St. Paul for 90% of the time. And then after my divorce I moved to Minneapolis.
- Maya Washington: And so your family-- you've been here for almost two generations now.
- Vanne Owens Hayes: Yeah, my father moved here. And my father was Executive Director at the St. Paul Urban League and he came here for that position I think in 1942. Oh. And then I was born here (my siblings weren't) and then they stayed here.
- Maya Washington: And can you say your parents' names?
- Vanne Owens Hayes: Well, my father was Sterling Vincent Owens and my mother was Wanda Owens.
- Maya Washington: And when did you get involved with either the Tennis Buffs or Mr. Greene? Which came first?

- Vanne Owens Hayes: My involvement with Mr. Greene was, he was like a family friend. I had a close friend, Adrian Coleman, and somehow they're related. His wife Edie was someone I used to just think was the most beautiful woman. And we would have gatherings, you know, I would see him and just sort of, you know, in the neighborhood, but he was kind of a legend, playing tennis because in the black community at the time, he still, when I can think of that was playing tennis.
- Maya Washington: And so how often were you playing tennis and getting involved at the MLK Courts or Central High School before a handful of you decided maybe we should make this more formal?
- Vanne Owens Hayes: Well, when I was at Central learning, I learned that I could go take lessons from Duke Greene and I took lessons with Duke Greene, at the King Center. And then there were other people, I think Sondra Hickman, I can't remember if she was taking lessons at the same time, but it seemed like we started out together with drills. I was not very good, but I kept at it and I think it was something my husband and I thought we could do together. We didn't have a lot of money. Tennis, didn't cost us anything but the racket and the balls. So we continued playing. There were people like Joetta McAdams and Lucille Bryant. I think Helen Reed, Leslie Gardener that had been playing for a while and Lucille helped Mr. Greene and he had another woman that was quite a character, just an amazing woman named Esther who helped train. And so we all played tennis. And I think it was really Lucille and Joetta, and maybe Helen and Leslie, they decided to get organized but I wasn't part of the organization.
- Maya Washington: Now you referred to Mr. Greene as Duke. Can you talk about his nickname?
- Vanne Owens Hayes: You know, I don't know how he got the name. He was just always Duke Greene and so that's the only way I ever referred to him. I don't even know if I knew his real first name.
- Maya Washington: Ernie.
- Vanne Owens Hayes: That's right. Yeah, that's right. Yeah. Cause we have some funny jokes, you know, the tennis group at the court was became like family. So yeah.
- Maya Washington: Tell me then about his approach as a teacher. What was he like when he was teaching you?
- Vanne Owens Hayes: He was very calm, gentle, reassuring, and patient. Thank goodness because I think I was pretty much a disaster cause I couldn't, you know, I didn't grow up playing sports like that. And so when they said you can't, you know, you have to watch the ball till it hits that racket. I was like, "I'm watching the ball." But after a while I learned that just before I hit it, you know, I'm looking at where it's going to go. So, he was really patient and he would come and he would show you, and very reassuring. And I think that's probably why I was able to continue with it.

Maya Washington: Tell me about what socializing at the courts was like. What the atmosphere was like on a Saturday or a Sunday, or a week night?

Vanne Owens Hayes: When I was really into playing tennis, I think I played probably almost every day, and all day on Saturday. When my kids were growing up, they learned to play tennis too. But when we were down there like on the weekend there was, Oh, I can't think of his name. He belonged to my church. Rock White, was his name, and Rock was in the Legion and they, his family, made tacos and we would have runs to go to the VFW and get tacos and somebody would pick up something to drink and we'd be there all day, you know, all day long meeting new people. And it was, it was a lot of fun.

Maya Washington: So tell me about law school and how tennis kind of helped you through that time in your life.

Vanne Owens Hayes: Well, when, you know, law school was my second career and I was in student activities at the University of Minnesota when I thought I need to do something different. And I took a workshop to find out what I could do and Law came up number one to my shock. So I interviewed some people and one of them was a tennis player at the King Center. He wasn't very encouraging, actually, in fact, the opposite. But he was just one of many people. So when I got admitted, I didn't know if I'd still be able to do it. But the hours and the pressure was a great outlet for me to come in and hit the ball. And people would say, "Oh my God, she's hitting her ball so hard" and then it would take me awhile to kind of slow down and play like normal, normal people.

Vanne Owens Hayes: But it was a great outlet when I was studying for the bar because I'd study all day, and you're sitting, and your mind is just overwhelmed with facts that you can't talk to anybody else because somebody else is studying for the bar. And so it was a great outlet for me. I just loved, and when my kids were playing sports, they were in junior high. No, I guess high school and then the first year of college when I was playing and I would go and I was a very vocal fan because that also releases a lot of tension. So, yeah, it helped me get through law school. I have to give it, you know, and it was great support, for people down there. Cause you know, you can always get someone to play tennis with you. All you had to do was show up at the court with your tennis racket and then you waited your turn to play. And if you didn't play well and there was a really good player, sometimes he'd pass on playing with you. And you know why they were there. Funny, funny experiences that way. But that's the way it was, you know. Competitive at times, but always I guess, like family, all the good, and the not so good.

Maya Washington: And what years were you at university of Minnesota? The law school?

Vanne Owens Hayes: From '81 to '84. I was there as a student and then I got hired at the law school as a Dean so I stayed there until '96, so I think it was '96, '97.

- Maya Washington: So were there many black women law students when you were there?
- Vanne Owens Hayes: When I went, our class was the first time that the law school had, I think it was 10%, out of a class of 250. Well it wasn't. It was students of color. We weren't all black and we were organizing and there were some people that I knew that were lawyers that I had grown up with. And so they were kind of supportive to our, you know, organization efforts within the school.
- Maya Washington: And so when you became a Dean, were there other black administrators or black leadership at the law school at that time?
- Speaker 3: I replaced a black man who left the law school administration and then there was someone in the clinic, there was someone in the library. Eventually we got more, but I'm sure there's still very few.
- Maya Washington: So how important was it then as a pioneer in a lot of ways, you spent most of your day maybe being one of few or the only one. And having a place like the MLK Tennis Courts to go to, to release tension as well as socialize, what role did the Buffs play in that relationship to belonging versus what your life might've been like during the day where you might've been isolated?
- Vanne Owens Hayes: Well, when you work in a professional capacity, you know, you have to keep within certain boundaries, especially when, you know, people are watching and assessing you all the time. So it was a sense of freedom to be, be yourself. I think everybody felt that people that came to the courts did all kinds of things. You know, there are other, there were lawyers and judges and secretaries and teachers and everybody had, you know, in Minnesota, there was never a lot of blacks in any one place. So we all shared our stories about what came up that day, you know, what, look, what word, action. And then we just, you know, accepted each other for who we are.
- Maya Washington: Wonderful. And so what did you notice once those who actually made the MLK Tennis Buffs into an official thing? What were some of the changes or what was the result of the gathering being more organized?
- Vanne Owens Hayes: Well when I started playing tennis, it was just as an outlet. It was, you know, exercise and fun. When they got organized they started getting competitive and they started going to competitions outside the Twin Cities and you know, regional areas. And so it was opening up opportunities, I guess to be competitive on a wider scale for those who wanted to go further and some of the people that were involved, really got involved in either teaching tennis or working for the United States Tennis Association. So I think it was, you know, launching people into new opportunities in the tennis world.
- Maya Washington: Can you tell me a little bit about Lucille Bryant Little and your impression of her?

Vanne Owens Hayes: Well, Lucille I've known almost forever. I'm in bridge club with her, too. And Lucille was always very athletic. I think one of the things I remember when I was in high school is I think they had a swimming pool in their home. And I didn't know many people that had swimming pools and she swam and she exercised. And she and Joetta McAdams were very close. And I think they played tennis a lot, but she was always into fitness. And that was sort of an example of taking care of yourself beyond just, you know, looking good, but just really, you know, living a fuller life. And they played tennis, you know, I don't even know if Lucille has stopped. She played, instructed and competed. And our kids played too. And she helped get the youth program launched as well.

Maya Washington: Did you encounter Nina Zachary at all?

Vanne Owens Hayes: The Zachary's were close family friends and my siblings were best friends with their counterparts in the Zachary family. Her sister-in-law was my godmother and at one point in time we lived next door to each other. So Nina started playing. I don't know exactly when she started playing, but she, you know, she was a good tennis player and she was, you know, definitely fit, you know, to play. And she was kind of in that, that group. I don't remember if her children played. I think she may have tried, but she was a teacher. So, you know, education was natural for her. I don't remember her daughter actually playing. I think they were in other sports and her son I think may have tried. I don't think they were as active. Like Lucille's children were competitive. I mean entered competitions. I think it's Bobby. He might've even gotten some trophies playing.

Maya Washington: Do you have children?

Vanne Owens Hayes: I do. I have four children.

Maya Washington: Did they play tennis?

Vanne Owens Hayes: They did. I really encouraged them to play because it was such an easy thing to meet people. And I thought, you know, as they were dating, it was a comfortable thing to do. You know, you could play tennis. You know, get to know one another. So they played, now they didn't, I don't know if they, I don't think they've played as adults, but they play. Yeah, they all, they all played sports. They did everything.

Maya Washington: Were they involved with the Tennis Buffs or did they play tennis at school?

Vanne Owens Hayes: They took lessons from Duke at the youth things. And I think my son Darin was probably the most active in tennis. And I remember he did some dating. You know, it was a way to meet girls. And I always liked their dates to be active in something. So it was less pressure.

Maya Washington: So did that son go on to continue playing tennis? Like does he play tennis now?

- Vanne Owens Hayes: He doesn't. He's got two daughters. One daughter is a basketball player and I tried to get her and her sister to play. It was a lack of time, I think with the basketball and traveling and, and all of that. I'm still hopeful they'll take it up.
- Maya Washington: Tell me about some of the tennis parties.
- Vanne Owens Hayes: Well, when we started playing tennis at other places, we would go and, you'd play the sort of the tennis games. You'd have some music and food. And when you weren't playing, you could play, I think bid whist was probably the most popular. I don't know if we had got into dominoes and spades, but we played at, I think it was out in Bloomington, we played at several different venues. I'm sure we were the first blacks to sort of integrate then for social activity. But they would be like on a Saturday evening. They'd send out notices to everybody. You could bring a friend. And actually I met my current husband at one of the parties. He was, his date was somebody else and it was just meeting an acquaintance and then later when I met him to actually talk to him.
- Vanne Owens Hayes: Yeah. My current husband was at one of those tennis parties with his date and we were waiting, it wasn't our turn to play. And so we just sat there and talked and I knew his date because I had gone to school, to college, with her. And then sometime later, we met again at the Riverview and I remember talking to him. But yeah, tennis, tennis is so good for getting to meet people. When I was active in the National Bar Association and they'd have these meetings all over. These conferences, all over the country. And I remember I got to play Rodney King's attorney. We played mixed doubles. I was like, I am meeting some people I never thought I would meet because I could play tennis.
- Maya Washington: So describe what that is. It was a league within the National Bar Association, or it was, you went to a conference or a meeting and some people after the meeting got together to play tennis?
- Vanne Owens Hayes: Well, the way that our regional conferences--I shouldn't say regional, but the way these conferences, they had like three or four a year and they would plan activities around the conference. So they had workshops and then you had a golf tournament, they had tennis competition. They had a lot of activities for that. The lawyers and their significant others. And so I decided I would play tennis and I remember going to one in Atlanta and I played mixed doubles with him. And then, and that was a good thing because it was before the Rodney King incident happened and when I was at the law school, I was able to bring him to the law school so the students could ask him about that case. So it kinda connected different parts of my life together.
- Maya Washington: Do you remember what his name is?
- Vanne Owens Hayes: Yeah, I was trying to think of that. I'd have to tell you later.

- Maya Washington: Okay, no worries. So, moving on to just your family background, unless there's anything else tennis related that I may have forgotten about to ask or omitted, but I think you answered some great tennis questions.
- Vanne Owens Hayes: I don't know. There's just, you know, there's a million stories, so I can't think of anything that it's crucial for you to know.
- Maya Washington: Okay. So your parents, when did your parents come to the Twin Cities?
- Vanne Owens Hayes: They came in 1942.
- Maya Washington: And your dad came to take a job?
- Vanne Owens Hayes: Yes, he was an executive. My dad was Executive Director at the St. Paul Urban League at a time when housing and job opportunities were pretty restricted for black folks. And he came to, he had a reputation for opening up housing. He had worked in Kentucky, I think for federal government, I'm not sure. But anyways, he came here and he brought on people like, you know, Whitney Young and Carl Rowan and different folks on the staff and they work to get work opportunities and living opportunities and you know, for people in the Twin Cities. So he was, he was quite well known and he was sort of a fiery activist as I recall.
- Maya Washington: And so your mother, did they meet prior to coming to the Twin Cities?
- Vanne Owens Hayes: Well they were, they were married and had three kids before they came here and had me. They had met in college. And I don't know a whole lot. My siblings were 10, 12, and 15 years older than me. So I was always the baby that they were bossing.
- Maya Washington: I can relate to that. Do you know where your parents attended college?
- Vanne Owens Hayes: They went to Kansas State University. And then I'm not sure where my father got a Master's degree. I can't remember where he got it. I don't know if he got it at the University of Minnesota. I think he had it before he came here. And then after he died, my mother who had graduated, she was like, I think she may have graduated first in her class. She was really smart. She went back to school and got a teaching degree and then taught at Hill school in St. Paul.
- Maya Washington: What was it like as a small girl growing up in the St. Paul community? Were you in the Rondo neighborhood?
- Vanne Owens Hayes: I was on the fringe of the Rondo neighborhood. From what I remember, we lived at 627 Selby. And Rondo didn't go that far. And so the neighborhood I grew up in was like a little United Nations. I had neighbors from Eastern Europe and Japan, Korea. Jewish neighbors and other faiths. And we went to school at Webster. And most of my friends who grew up in the Rondo neighborhood went to Maxfield or McKinley, but our friends and our activities and our church and

everything else was in the Rondo community. I was like two blocks away. I went to daycare at Hallie Q. Brown. was active there and in the church. My parents were Baptist. I became a Episcopalian, but all our social activities where there.

Maya Washington: What church did your family attend?

Vanne Owens Hayes: I attended Holy Trinity. It started out as Saint Phillips, which was right up the street from the original Hallie Q. Brown on Aurora.

Maya Washington: And then your parents?

Vanne Owens Hayes: My parents attended Pilgrim. And then my, I think my dad got mad at the pastor and he joined the Unitarian church. But he would walk me to Sunday school at Pilgrim. And then when I was a teenager, my mother said I could choose and I chose to join the Episcopal church.

Maya Washington: So is your dad still working for the Urban League at the time the freeway was built?

Vanne Owens Hayes: No. Both my parents were deceased by the time the freeway was built. But when the freeway came through, I was living with my sister at 1018 Carol, which is just a block away. It came through in 63. So in 63 I had been married a year maybe. Yeah.

Maya Washington: So your siblings were much older than you, so you have older parents. Did they pass from natural causes?

Vanne Owens Hayes: Well I think my dad died when he was 43 and he died of a stroke. And I think it was because of all the pressures of dealing with the civil rights issues cause he was night and day and just some, you know, unbelievable experiences. My mother had leukemia and she died when she was 52. So they were young. You know, at the time I didn't think they were young. You know, they were old to me and so when people would be compassionate and feel sorry for me, I would think to myself, "But they were old." Um, but the good thing about that in growing up in the Rondo community is their friends and the people that knew us were committed to me having, uh, the same kind of life as if I had.

Maya Washington: All right. So, we interrupted you. You were talking about after your parents passed, the community made sure that they took care of you.

Vanne Owens Hayes: Oh, the community. It was, it was sometimes not welcome because it was just like, you know, you know, "Your dad wouldn't have you do that," or "Your mother wouldn't let you do that," or that [would] have me enrolled in activities I wasn't particularly interested in. But the real core of it was that they saw that I had the experience. I got to be a debutante. I got to have a nice graduation and a nice wedding. All of that with people you know planning and getting involved. So I really had a sense of a caring, supportive community growing up.

- Maya Washington: And how old were you when they passed?
- Vanne Owens Hayes: I was eight when my father died and thirteen when my mother died.
- Maya Washington: Very young. And so since you were so young and you knew your dad was working on civil rights issues, what were some of the concerns related to housing or discrimination that he was working on? Either that you were aware of at the time or maybe that your siblings or other community members have told you about?
- Vanne Owens Hayes: It's kinda hard to separate exactly when, but I, I knew from the people gathered at the house and sometimes I would accompany him to dinners. I remember going to Governor Youngdahl's, I think it was Luther Youngdahls. Somewhere in this world there's a picture of me sitting on a table in his office or something. And you know, I went to the office with him several times and heard some of the discussions. But then the people that sort of surrounded me, especially Reverend Denzil Angus Carty, who was the priest at Holy Trinity was also social justice. And there were other adults, I think Jim Mann who was a police officer and belonged to my church and Jimmy Griffin who was the father of one of my close friends. So you'd hear that discussion and we were taught to believe that she could go farther than society lets you, so we were very aware of where you were welcome, where you weren't welcome and that you were breaking barriers.
- Vanne Owens Hayes: But that was our sort of cause, too, you know. Like when I was in high school, I belonged to Y teens group. I think there were two of us that were black in the group and it was in Highland Park because that was before Highland High School was built. And when we would go out into that community, you know, you'd get all the stares and you kind of, you know, expected that. And so there were a lot of stories that people told about working with whites, you know, who didn't want you there. I had work experiences like that. So all the while you just kept pushing forward.
- Maya Washington: And you said Y teens like the YMCA or did you say white?
- Vanne Owens Hayes: Like no, like the YMCA. Yeah, I was very much involved in the Y and at Hallie Q. Brown. And I, at one time I was in Girl Scouts. As I say, you know, they got me involved in everything. And it really was that you were there for a purpose, you know, so if you were uncomfortable or reluctant, you just had to press on.
- Maya Washington: And who took on guardianship of you after your mother passed away?
- Vanne Owens Hayes: My sister Ermon, who is 12 years older than me. She had, I think she must have been my legal guardian when my mother first said I went to California and lived with an aunt. She wasn't a blood relative, but she'd, I think she and my mother must have been friends growing up and I stayed there for a year, but I was very unhappy. And I loved being in Los Angeles and I got to see the world from a

different angle. But my aunt worked for the police department and she was super paranoid and protective about me being out after six o'clock at night. And I had a lot of freedom growing up in Minnesota. I wasn't used to people saying, you can't go out after six and I'll take you there, you know, I was used to walking. So it was really an adjustment.

Vanne Owens Hayes: And my brother moved out there and he came to visit and he told my sister, "She's not the same person, you have to take her back." So then I came back and went to Central and finished.

Maya Washington: You named some people who worked with your father. A reverend you mentioned, how do you spell his name?

Vanne Owens Hayes: Reverend Denzil A. Carty was the priest at Holy Trinity. I mean at St. Phillips when I was a teenager.

Maya Washington: Do you know how to spell his first name?

Vanne Owens Hayes: D. E. N. Z. I. L., C.A. R. T. Y.

Maya Washington: And there was a police officer, his name you mentioned?

Vanne Owens Hayes: James Mann, M. A. N. N. Now those were people that helped me. And then the most prominent person was James T. Murray, my friend Mary Kay's father. I lived with them for a while and he was my father figure until he died. He and his wife were like second parents and I'm still close. Very close to that family. My father had Whitney Young and Carl Rowan. He worked for this Star Tribune for a while and wrote a book and moved away from here. Someone sent me an article in one of the housing challenges. My father invited Thurgood Marshall here when Thurgood Marshall was an attorney. And I said, Whoa, that was, you know, good to know. So, our family was more like an Urban League family. My sister went to work for the National Urban League and my brother, when he lived in Los Angeles, was involved with the Urban League there. And then, I worked for a while for the Urban League, before I went back to school and, in student activities and then eventually into Law.

Maya Washington: Could you say the names of your siblings who worked for the Urban League?

Vanne Owens Hayes: My sister, Ermon, E. R. M. O. N Owens Hogan Kamara. Hogan, H.O.G.A.N and Kamara, K.A.M.A.R.A And she went on to work for the Urban League. And then, she worked for Peace Corps in Africa. And then she opened up a school in Africa. But she got cancer. And so she's passed. My brother, Sterling, was Sterling Jr., and he worked for the Los Angeles Urban League. And then he was in corporate. He started some businesses there. I didn't really keep track of them, but they're all gone. And then my sister Wanda, who after my mother, she was active in the US Army and in the Air force. And I've looked at pictures and she was like the only one. So it explained a lot of her willingness to charge by herself. She used

to drive all over the United States by herself. And my mother would always be, "Oh my God, you can't do that." But I understand a little more.

Maya Washington: Do you have a sense of where your grandparents were raised?

Vanne Owens Hayes: No, I have some pictures. My sister did a sort of a family tree she started and while I had pictures, I don't know what they did for a living.

Maya Washington: Do you know if your family has roots prior to Kansas city? Did they live anywhere before Kansas?

Vanne Owens Hayes: Louisville, Kentucky, Kansas. Oh, Salina, Kansas and Kansas City, Missouri, that area. And then, there's some trace of Wisconsin and Ohio, but we used to get calls about Owens. Apparently there's not many people named Owens in the United States. So when my father died, someone called. They were from Owensboro Kentucky and they were white. So they were kind of surprised that the Owens was not white. I have the, the information. Well actually my son has it of what she did, but I don't really know. They probably were farmers, you know, worked on farms.

Maya Washington: So is there anything, that maybe I didn't ask or that you think is important to mention about St. Paul's black community?

Vanne Owens Hayes: You know, I have been so active in promoting the spirit of Rondo community and I would like us to get that spirit of connectedness back. And I think the, the Rondo Days has supported that. And, and there's a number of things now that are exploring the history by 94. And you see them. That Weisman museum had a display. There's been a number of things that have really been looking back at the history. And so I think it is a signal having that more difficult conversations around race and economics and social position that, nice Minnesotans don't generally want to have. So you know, I think that's, that's good. And so I think there's some promise, some hope if people really, you know, put in the time. But we were raised, I mean, we had such support and I think that's, we need to get back to people feeling like they're supported.

Interview with Hattie Black
25 August 2019, at 270 Mackubin Street, Saint Paul, MN 55102

Maya Washington: Would you please state your name?

Hattie Black: Hattie Black.

Maya Washington: Could you tell me how long your family has been in the Twin Cities?

Hattie Black: I came in 1970.

Maya Washington: 1970. And where were you before?

Hattie Black: I was in school. In New Orleans. Yeah. But I was born in Houston, Texas--South Park.

Maya Washington: My family's from Baytown/La Porte and specifically McNair. All of my grandparents migrated from Louisiana to Houston. So when you were in school in New Orleans, what were you studying?

Hattie Black: Biology and chemistry.

Maya Washington: Biology and chemistry. And so, did you, come to the Twin Cities for work--or what was it that brought you?

Hattie Black: I came here, I was recruited, from the University of Minnesota to work as a scientist in the genetics department.

Maya Washington: And in 1970 were there are many women or people of color with that kind of opportunity?

Hattie Black: No, I was the only one there.

Maya Washington: So thinking about that experience, have you always been a scientist? Have you always worked in science since that time?

Hattie Black: I'm a dentist now.

Maya Washington: A dentists now? Wow. So, could you maybe describe how you went from working at University of Minnesota as a geneticist into dentistry?

Hattie Black: I worked at the University of Minnesota for one year and our research labs were in the old dental school. So I'd visit the dental school every day. So, up and down the stairs going through the clinic. And one day I decided, well this might

be something I can do. So I decided to take the aptitude tests and passed, and applied to the dental school at the University of Minnesota, got accepted and here I am today.

Maya Washington: And you're still a practicing dentist?

Hattie Black: I am. And getting ready to retire this year.

Maya Washington: So thinking about your time at University of Minnesota, did you encounter Mr. Greene during that time?

Hattie Black: I met Mr. Greene in 1972 I believe, and my husband and I decided we wanted to play tennis. So I think his sister in law knew Mr. Greene. So we just went out into the court, started hitting balls and I didn't know much about tennis. It was just a stress release. So they hit the balls every day after class and then, Mr. Greene and Esther Snypes decided they were going to teach, so we would join them and started taking tennis lessons with them. So yeah.

Maya Washington: Well, if I'm telling your story correctly, if I'm understanding it, you moved here for work at University of Minnesota in 1970 and you were able to go to dental school. You're able to go into dental school and during that time your husband and you...

Hattie Black: At that time he was not my husband.

Maya Washington: A friend. An important friend. You started to enjoy tennis because of Mr. Greene and Esther Snypes. And so it was more of a hobby that was a stress relief. Was your husband also in school with you? In dental school?

Hattie Black: In dental school. Yeah.

Maya Washington: And thinking about those early years in the Twin Cities, at the time did you live in St Paul? Is that where you made your home or did you live in Minneapolis?

Hattie Black: I lived in Minneapolis. In the Cedar Riverside Complex that's close to the school.

Maya Washington: And so thinking about those early years, did you find whether that was as a student or in work as a woman-- as a black person, did you feel that you encountered any discrimination or things that seem to be challenging because of your race or gender?

Hattie Black: I don't think so. I guess I'm not--I don't really think about that at all. So I just do what I need to do and know that at the time I'm doing my best, and whatever the outcome is, I don't associate it with race or whatever.

Maya Washington: Was there ever a time in your life or, growing up--you also grew up in Houston and went to school in New Orleans?

- Hattie Black: I went, yeah, I went to Xavier University for college. Yeah.
- Maya Washington: Did you ever have a sense growing up that you could be treated differently because of your race?
- Hattie Black: Probably at some time. I'm pretty sure but we grew up in not the city-- rural area, so it was just my family and some relatives. So we didn't encounter very many white people. So yeah, I don't remember going to the store, not frequently going to the shopping or anything like that because we raised all our food. We didn't have to go into town, so yeah. And we went to segregated schools, so that's all I knew.
- Maya Washington: That's good. And so thinking about whether it was Xavier, or University of Minnesota? Well, University of Minnesota, probably more so you did encounter more white people.
- Hattie Black: Of course. Yes.
- Maya Washington: What was that adjustment like for you?
- Hattie Black: I don't think it was an adjustment. I think that I just accepted people. I would, I just, I didn't think of it as any kind of a race thing. And I got along with all-- I was one of three women in my class, so they didn't treat me any different. So No. So, and I didn't treat them any different.
- Maya Washington: So with tennis, what is your earliest memory of tennis? Was it something that you were first introduced to through, Mr. Greene?
- Hattie Black: Through my sister-in-law. She knew Mr. Greene.
- Maya Washington: Okay. So you were definitely an adult when you got involved.
- Hattie Black: Of course, yes.
- Maya Washington: What was it about tennis that you and your then friend who became your husband, enjoyed about tennis as opposed to, maybe as a couple, taking up golf or another sport...
- Hattie Black: I think the activeness, you know, the...It's not slow. You have to concentrate and you have-- I kind of thought of it as a physics, you know? Hitting the ball, looking at your spot where you want it to land. So velocity and the speed. I guess I thought of it like that. Yeah.
- Maya Washington: So it was an extension of your passion for science?
- Hattie Black: Probably unconsciously, I think. Yeah.

- Maya Washington: The science of sport and specifically tennis in that way.
- Hattie Black: Right.
- Maya Washington: So the actual Tennis Buffs--what was your understanding of the organization that was built to give opportunities to community members to participate consistently in tennis?
- Hattie Black: It was the only African American organized tennis organization. And I thought there was a wonderful idea so that the people in the community can come. Kids, adults, anybody could come and learn. So it was a wonderful idea to get organized and have that organization to be predominantly African American.
- Maya Washington: And why was that particularly important at that time? Were there not other places where African Americans could participate?
- Hattie Black: There were places where African-American's could participate, but not as many. You would probably be the only one there on the other tennis courts. But here at MLK, your people were here. So it was nice just to be that.
- Maya Washington: Wonderful. Now, am I correct in understanding that you were part of the group to actually decide to make it an official organization?
- Hattie Black: No. No, I was not.
- Maya Washington: Thanks for the clarification. What is your understanding of how the group itself in a more formal capacity as the MLK Buffs started? Do you have a sense of that history?
- Hattie Black: No, I, I don't know. I, as far as I know, it's always been an organization, so yeah. So I, I don't even remember the year it was started. I think in the 80s, maybe.
- Maya Washington: You were possibly enjoying tennis before it became an official organization?
- Hattie Black: Correct. Possibly. Possible. I was in school all day. So after classes we just came and hit balls. Yeah.
- Maya Washington: That's really wonderful. So how many days a week do you think you were playing tennis?
- Hattie Black: Every day.
- Maya Washington: And so in that time from the first time your sister-in-law suggested it to maybe the time you completed dental school, how did your game improve?
- Hattie Black: Uh, it improved tremendously because I didn't know one thing about tennis when I first started, so I just know you hit the ball, you had to make sure it gets

over the net. To the opponent. And that's what we would do. We didn't have formal game at first. We were just there hitting balls at each other.

Maya Washington: And so when you think back about those times that you were here every evening, possibly on the weekends too sometimes?

Hattie Black: Yeah. On the weekends too.

Maya Washington: Were there any players that stand out in your mind or things that you remember about the community or socializing with others or watching other players?

Hattie Black: I remember the players. Some of them. Yeah. And we were all, they would be sitting on the bench and they would, have their water and snacks. And we would share. So, yeah. And like I said, it was something we would do every day. We didn't say, "I'm gonna meet you at the courts" or anything. We would just show up and someone would be there.

Maya Washington: And was there a time when anything unusual happened that you can recall whether that's a tournament or...

Hattie Black: Mr. Greene and some of the other players would organize tournaments, you know, and everybody's like city wide tournaments. So, we participated once we got to be better, participated in tournaments. And you would have the beginners and you have advanced and it would be a lot of fun. Yeah. And there were some participants who were really wanting to win. I was there just to play, which was nice. And to be involved in the community.

Maya Washington: Did you have other interests or passions in addition to tennis outside of your work life?

Hattie Black: I like the plays, movies, concerts. Yeah.

Maya Washington: And so when you think about the MLK Tennis Buffs and the legacy of that time, what do you think the importance or significance to St Paul or the Twin Cities, the MLK Buffs have? How should we remember that organization or this organization that currently exists?

Hattie Black: Um, I think we probably should remember MLK Tennis Buffs as a community organization for sure. But as a place where you could gather and have friends, and just talk and communicate with them and just have fun. Oh, it's a place where you had fun. Yeah, even though it was outside. So let's say it was very nice. And we have tennis parties. So, yeah, in the winter time.

Maya Washington: Can you tell me about the tennis parties?

- Hattie Black: They were like organized. You signed up to come to the party. There was food there, you played games. There was the person that organized the party. You talked-- just, it was just a place where you go to communicate with your friends. So it was good.
- Maya Washington: And so how do you think MLK Tennis Buffs can shape the future or provide something as special as what you had for this next generation?
- Hattie Black: I think keeping the younger students involved. Maybe getting--maybe in the media, I don't know if we are on social media or not, because I'm not really, but just getting the younger people more involved with tennis. Which will be really, really wonderful. Yeah. Because we are getting older. Although, we're still involved but not as much.
- Maya Washington: Do you still play fairly regularly?
- Hattie Black: Not as much as I used to and I'm doing other things.
- Maya Washington: How often do you get to the courts in the center?
- Hattie Black: Probably maybe twice a week, but sometimes I'm over in Minneapolis playing, not mainly here, so I haven't been to these courts in a while.
- Maya Washington: Have you been involved with any other tennis organizations in the Twin Cities?
- Hattie Black: No. Only the Buffs.
- Maya Washington: When you set up your dental practice, did you set it up in Minneapolis? Do you work in Minneapolis? Where are you now?
- Hattie Black: I live in St Paul and I work at the Indian Health Board. It's a community clinic and I've been there for close to 40 years.
- Maya Washington: Wow, that's fantastic. What a great contribution you made. So your husband, if I may ask, because it seems interesting as part of the history, he went into dentistry? Where did he end up in his practice?
- Hattie Black: Right. He was. His practice was in Minneapolis also, but, he's passed away now, but at that time, he had a practice in south Minneapolis.
- Maya Washington: So you were working in St. Paul for most of your career?
- Hattie Black: Nope. Minneapolis. And Indian Health Board is in there now. It's in Minneapolis. Yes.
- Maya Washington: Sorry, I misunderstood. Indian Health Board is in Minneapolis.

- Hattie Black: Right. It's in South Minneapolis.
- Maya Washington: And then he also worked in South Minneapolis.
- Hattie Black: Right.
- Maya Washington: At another...
- Hattie Black: Yeah. He had a private practice then. And then he had his private practice and then he worked at a community clinic also. That's South Side Community Clinic. Yeah.
- Maya Washington: Can I ask his name?
- Hattie Black: Tommy Black.
- Maya Washington: And did you have any children?
- Hattie Black: I have a daughter, Tiffany, who now lives in Houston.
- Maya Washington: Is Tiffany interested in tennis at all?
- Hattie Black: No, not at all. Basketball was her thing. Yeah.
- Maya Washington: Wonderful. Um, well thinking about Tennis Buffs, or just what it was like to be a pioneer in the sciences in the Twin cities, as a woman, as an African American. And then for both you and your husband and your family to build a life here, is there anything that I didn't ask you that you think is relevant, in someone who's not from Minnesota or this community understanding? What that journey was like for your family or anything that sticks out in your mind when you look back at your career here or your time here as an African American family?
- Hattie Black: Yeah, I don't think anything really sticks out in my mind. When I look at life, I think it is what you make it, you know? So, here in the Twin Cities, I know that we have lots of problems, but I think there are obstacles for sure, but you have to work through those obstacles if you want to succeed. And that's, that's been my philosophy my whole life. If you want something you've got to work hard to get it.
- Maya Washington: And where do you think that value system or that way of looking at life--where did you develop that from?
- Hattie Black: Probably from my parents. My mom and dad. They worked hard, you know, to get us to where we are today. So I have four sisters. We all went to college. We all made a career for ourselves, although it wasn't easy. But we did it.
- Maya Washington: Were your parents in the sciences?

- Hattie Black: No, my parents were just, my mom was a housewife, never worked outside of our house. My dad was like a (inaudible). They never--I don't, they never finished high school, but they worked hard too and we just followed their footsteps, so.
- Maya Washington: They must have been very proud of their girls.
- Hattie Black: Right.
- Maya Washington: Were your sisters also in the sciences? Or what fields did they go into?
- Hattie Black: Two of my sisters in education, two of them were principals. One was then a medical technologist and one's an accountant. We're all different.
- Maya Washington: Did they all stay in the South or where did they end up?
- Hattie Black: I have two in California and two in Houston. And we all went to different colleges, so we didn't follow each other.
- Maya Washington: Thank you for your time.
- Hattie Black: No problem. Enjoyed it.
- Maya Washington: And serving the community. I do have a question about Tiffany. What field did she end up in? U.
- Hattie Black: A graduate from Xavier University also, but she is in fine arts and business, so now she is in the financial field at an engineering company. And pursuing her art career on the side.

Interview with Harold Bridgeman
14 September 2019, at 3055 NE Columbia Ave., Minneapolis, MN 55418

Maya Washington: Could you tell me your name please?

Harold Bridgeman: My name is Harold Bridgeman.

Maya Washington: What's your earliest memory of tennis?

Harold Bridgeman: Oh, boy. When did I first started playing? My earliest memory would be when my brother was a probation officer in Chicago, and some of his friends liked to play tennis, so he started playing with them and then I just kind of joined in after a little bit. And so that's kind of my earliest memory and some of the, some of the parks in Chicago where we usually would play.

Maya Washington: How old were you or where were you, what stage in life were you in at that time?

Harold Bridgeman: I might've been, I might've been an undergraduate at that time. I would say I might've been maybe 18, 19 years old, something like that.

Maya Washington: And how did you meet Mr. Greene?

Harold Bridgeman: I met Ernie Greene when I was a graduate student at the University of Minnesota. Ernie worked at the medical school, I'm not quite sure. I think he was a chemist at the medical school. He was an avid tennis player and he would always be at the old tennis courts on the University campus. That no longer exists unfortunately.

Maya Washington: And so would you say your brother inspired you to get involved in tennis and then crossing paths with Ernie Greene? Did that cause your tennis to increase or for you to become more active as a tennis player?

Harold Bridgeman: Yes, my brother did encourage me more because he was a great athlete and you know, I wanted to hang out with him and play tennis with him. And Ernie would always be at the university courts. And Ernie was just a wonderful guy. He was like our mentor and just a wonderful teacher and he would always try to give you a few instructions. So that helped a great deal.

Maya Washington: And could you tell me your brother's name?

Harold Bridgeman: My brother's name is John.

Maya Washington: Could you say the full name?

Harold Bridgeman: Oh, I'm sorry. John Bridgeman.

- Maya Washington: And how did Mr. Greene's relationship to the University of Minnesota or working in the medical school intersect with his being involved in tennis with the black community?
- Harold Bridgeman: Well, Ernie's involvement with the black community sort of was an offshoot of where he lived in St. Paul. And he knew many of the African Americans, black people in St. Paul. And so they got together and they met. And Ernie not only played tennis at the university, but he would also play over in St. Paul and he would also give instructions to various people at both the university and in St. Paul. So that's how that all began. And he eventually started, he was one of the founding members of the Tennis Buffs as well as the St. Paul Urban Tennis Program. So they, they're all kind of intertwined, so to speak.
- Maya Washington: And so what would you say your earliest impressions of him were? If I were an alien from another planet and you had to give me instructions on how to pick Ernie Greene out in a crowd, how would you describe him?
- Harold Bridgeman: I guess I would say Ernie Greene was not a flamboyant type person, but a very kind of laid back, relaxed kind of individual. And if you walked up to him to say hi, you would immediately feel at ease because he had that kind of, that kind of, I don't know, aura are ambient. So something about him that said, Oh, this is a nice guy here, let me chit chat a little bit.
- Maya Washington: And so what do you think his first impressions were of you as a tennis player? Were you first introduced to one another as colleagues, as grad students and fellow professionals at the university?
- Harold Bridgeman: Oh, the tennis side came first because Ernie would be at the university courts and there were a lot of courts at the university at that time. And we would just run into him at various times and we got introduced. I honestly don't remember who introduced us on the tennis court, but somebody did. And from there, that point on, we'd always get, we'd be playing on a court right next to him, we talked to him a little bit. If we do something really dumb, he would try to correct us and say, well, you know, maybe you are hitting the ball up a little too high, maybe you should try to kinda angle your racket a little differently. And it was never intrusive, it was always like a helpful hint, so to speak.
- Maya Washington: And who did he usually play against or partner with at the university courts? Do you recall who he was playing with as a partner at that time or who his opponents were that he'd be playing casually with?
- Harold Bridgeman: Right. His partner at the university courts was a physician who taught at the medical school and they were, they would either play each other, at the university or they would play doubles against another other two opponents. So they were tennis partners for years. The interesting thing about his tennis partner was, he had only one lung, but he was an avid tennis player and a great guy too.

- Maya Washington: And do you recall his name?
- Harold Bridgeman: I can't recall his name. Dr. Johnson pops into mind, but I could be wrong. So don't quote me on that.
- Maya Washington: Dr. Johnson.
- Harold Bridgeman: Maybe. It's been so long, but I remember Dr. Johnson and Ernie, they were always together.
- Maya Washington: And so how would you say your visits to the university courts have evolved from a form of socializing to actually it being a sport you wanted to grow in, to become better at?
- Harold Bridgeman: I think I wanted to become better just because you got a chance to see so many good players at the university, not only other individuals who just happened to be affiliated with the university. But the university tennis team would practice there and the coach would be giving them instructions. So all you have to do is sit behind the Tennis team and then listen to the instruction from the coach. And you could pick up hints about how you, how to improve your game. So that was just kind of a, a natural thing there at the university courts.
- Maya Washington: And so when were you first introduced to the MLK courts?
- Harold Bridgeman: *Well, when I moved to St. Paul, when I first came to town, I lived in Minneapolis, not too far from the university, so it was easy to get to the university courts. The other thing is my brother lived very close to the university, so that was his kind of home court. But when I moved to St. Paul, I began to look around for other places to go in the courts and Rondo neighborhood of St. Paul, were the courts where most African Americans played. So I just kind of went there and Ernie would be there teaching again. He had a bunch of kids he would teach and then he would teach adults as well. So that's kinda how that evolved.*
- Maya Washington: *You were not there when the MLK Buffs were formalized into an organization, but when do you think you officially decided to join the MLK Tennis Buffs?*
- Harold Bridgeman: Well I, as I began to play more at the courts at MLK, many of the people who were playing, they were members of the Tennis Buffs. And I got to know them and I was friends with many of them, and just hanging around the tennis courts. After a while one of the persons who ran the Buffs by the name of Ernestine King said, "Why didn't you join?" And I said, "Well, okay." So I joined the Tennis Buffs. So that's how it kind of got off the ground.
- Maya Washington: And what year do you think that was?

Harold Bridgeman: I'd say I officially joined in about, I'd say about 1988, something like that. '88, '89, somewhere in there. As far as I can remember. It could be a little earlier, a little bit later.

Maya Washington: And in those days, what was a typical court like? Excuse me, what was a typical day at the court like either on a weeknight or on a weekend? How would you describe the atmosphere?

Harold Bridgeman: Oh, okay. The atmosphere at the courts on the weekends people would arrive at the courts as early as nine o'clock in the morning and they would be there. There would be many people there all day from nine in the morning until seven or eight o'clock in the evening. During weekdays, people would arrive at the courts maybe, after work, maybe five o'clock, six o'clock, and they'd be there until it got dark. And there was, there seemed to be a lot more people, who came around the courts then than now. Many people have moved away. Many people have passed away. Just all sorts of things have happened. But there was a large crowd of people who were always around the courts when I first started attending in late eighties.

Maya Washington: And how much would you say your brother and you leaned on the MLK Buffs Community and those who hung out at the court? For more than just social exercise, did you develop any friendships or relationships that sustained you in other ways? Maybe professionally or personally? How, if at all, was the MLK buffs more than just a game of tennis?

Harold Bridgeman: Right. Many of the people that you met that were members of the Tennis Club or at least played at those courts, the MLK courts you got to know them and you got to be friends with them and you got invited to their house or invited to other social occasions or anything else that might be helpful. You know, you kind of interacted with a lot of people, and things just grew.

Maya Washington: Wow. Do you know, in terms of your getting involved, did you become a board member right away or, or were you a member for awhile and then got more actively involved? What was that evolution for you?

Harold Bridgeman: Right. I was just a member for a year or two. And then Ernestine King, who was this, who ran the club, who was treasurer of the club says, "Okay, Harold it's time for you to become the treasurer." I said, "Okay, well, whatever you need." And so because I liked Ernestine so much, I just couldn't resist. So I became the treasurer and I've been the treasurer for the last 15, 18, I don't know how many years.

Maya Washington: And so Ernestine, can you tell me a little bit about her, what her profession was?

Harold Bridgeman: Right. Ernestine King was, I think she was a school social worker. She and her husband, Sam, he enjoyed playing tennis. So she just kinda ran the club. And

when she retired from being a social worker, she continued to run the club and then she involved me, you know, asked me. I guess she got tired of being treasurer and so she had me be the treasurer. So that's how that kind of evolved.

Maya Washington: Now, can you tell me about some of the programs you had for young people in the nineties, late eighties, early nineties?

Harold Bridgeman: Sure like I said earlier, a little bit earlier, Ernie Greene was, he always taught a class every week, usually on a Saturday afternoon for our young people for the children who might come by and for adults even who couldn't play. So they would be playing with little children and big adults would just be learning the game. And for a while I would kind of help Ernie. I'd go collect balls or put the kids in line whenever he needed done. Cause I was sort of like an assistant for him when he was teaching those lessons on the weekends. And, so that's how that kind of evolved in St. Paul.

Maya Washington: And then when or how did you all decide to merge with Urban Tennis?

Harold Bridgeman: Well, it's not really a merger, we were two separate organizations. The connection is that Ernie was a founder of both organizations, the St. Paul Urban Tennis League, as well as the MLK Tennis Buffs. Ernie is a founder of each one, although they're totally separate now. The Urban Tennis program, they teach children in the summer. MLK Tennis Buffs teach children in the summer as well as adults. Anybody who wants to learn, you can go to either one and you should be able to get lessons.

Maya Washington: Do you know why he started Urban Tennis?

Harold Bridgeman: Some of his, well some of his friends, I think they played at another court that Ernie happened to attend and I think they encouraged him to join with them and the Urban Tennis program, whereas the people in the MLK courts, they of course, wanted him as their teacher with MLK Tennis Buffs.

Maya Washington: Do you have any stories about some of the young people who've come through the Buffs programming and any success stories of young people who succeeded in tennis because they were part of the Buffs or succeeded in other areas of life because they were part of the Buffs?

Harold Bridgeman: I'm sure that there are a number of people, I don't remember their names, but they were young people at the time. I can remember, I think one of the girls got a tennis scholarship, so she was able to attend college on a tennis scholarship. I think another, I think Bill Roddy might've even been a part of the, no I take that back. No, he wasn't part of that group, but two or three people, they developed very well and I think a couple of them got to college on tennis scholarships.

Maya Washington: Can you tell me about how you all set up tournaments and competitions? With other black tennis players in Minnesota or in other States? How did you set up tournaments or find competition outside of the MLK courts?

Harold Bridgeman: Well, the MLK Tennis Buffs are one of the tennis clubs that are part of the Midwest Tennis Association, which is part of the American Tennis Association. It's a black organization, a little bit different from the USTA. It was founded in the early days when blacks could not play in the USTA. So it's still in existence. And the ATA, the American Tennis Association has various regions and we belong to the Midwest region. So the MLK Tennis Buffs are part of a group of tennis clubs throughout the Midwest who belong to this organization. And so they have their regional tournament every summer. Usually it's in Indianapolis, cause that's kind of in the middle of Michigan, Wisconsin, all the Midwest States. And the national tournament is wherever the national board decides to hold the tournament. I think now, most of the time it's in Florida, but it used to be all over the country because my brother and I used to attend the ATA tournament for our summer vacation and we would go to Indianapolis for them. The regional in early summer and then we'd go to wherever the national tournament was in the late summer. So that's kind of the connection and how we got to play in many tournaments and met a lot of different people. You know, had a great time traveling around.

Maya Washington: How did you fare in those tournaments?

Harold Bridgeman: Let me see. We might win a round or two, but the competition was much, much tougher because they're coming from five or six different States and so you knew, you're gonna run into some stiff competition. We'd win at maybe one or two rounds if we were lucky. If we weren't, we'd just watch the other players if we got kicked out of the competition early. But we had a great time.

Maya Washington: And what did it mean to, to be exposed to so many African American players when tennis was still very much an all white sport?

Harold Bridgeman: Oh, it was very interesting. In the early, rather in the late eighties, it was beginning to pick up because that's when Arthur Ashe had become popular as a player and he had kind of, he's sort of like pulled a lot of other African-Americans into the sport. And so it began to expand. I would say the time of Ashe, I would say he was in like the mid, early eighties, because we, I think one of the national tournaments was held and when he passed away it was held in Richmond, his hometown. It was a great tournament. But that's how things began to expand for more African-Americans entering tennis.

Maya Washington: Now moving on to just sort of those personal questions about your background. What year did you come to the Twin Cities?

Harold Bridgeman: I came to the Twin Cities in 1969 to go to graduate school.

- Maya Washington: And what were things like for African Americans in the Twin Cities at that time? Were there a lot of African Americans in Minneapolis and St. Paul? How would you describe it to someone who wasn't there, who doesn't know what it was like in those times?
- Harold Bridgeman: Well, when I first came to town I was usually at the university, so I wasn't out and about a lot, but there are always enclaves of African Americans in Minneapolis and North Minneapolis and then the Rondo neighborhood of St. Paul. And so those were the two neighborhoods that if you were looking for some African Americans, that's where you went.
- Maya Washington: Did you feel a need to be around other black people, for some part of your day to day life or activity because there was an absence of black people at the university or was it a comfort thing that if you wanted a certain type of food or get your hair cut or things that from a practical standpoint that you needed to do in your life that you would go to the black community for? What was your relationship to the black community as a new transplant?
- Harold Bridgeman: Well, yes. The most obvious thing is what you just mentioned about if you need a haircut, you know, where to find the black barbers in North Minneapolis or in the Rondo neighborhood. If you wanted to go to a jazz club, you went to North Minneapolis or someplace not too far from the Rondo neighborhood. And if you wanted some blues, that's where you went. And that's how you got your, maintained your connections to the African American community. And at the university, you might, in 1969, you might see one or two African Americans but not very many.
- Maya Washington: What did you study in graduate school?
- Harold Bridgeman: I was in the school psychology department.
- Maya Washington: Okay. And then you went onto William Mitchell, correct? Correct. Could you talk a little bit about the, the years that you were at William Mitchell?
- Harold Bridgeman: Oh, right. Well, I just decided that there were some other things that probably impacted some of the children I used to see when I was a school psychologist and I thought it might be good to, pursue a legal kind of education in order to address some of those things. So that's kind of prompted me to go to law school. So I went to law school and in an attempt to at least think about those things.
- Maya Washington: I didn't ask you before. Did you then go into practice as a lawyer or did you take that legal education back into schools?
- Harold Bridgeman: Oh, no, I never practiced as a lawyer. I was never a practicing. Yeah, I, I tried to take it back to the psychology that I had learned and I think it gave me more insight and it was helpful. You know, some people are born to, just continually

learn and that's what I am. I like to learn things. And even today, I'm out learning stuff and my, it's like what are you reading that for? I say well, I don't know anything about this, you know, so I'm reading it.

Maya Washington: So about the time that you arrived in the Twin Cities, Interstate 94 was pretty much completed by then. What, if any, awareness did you have about the way that interstate coming through the community had impacted the St. Paul Black community? Was it something you were aware of at the time?

Harold Bridgeman: Oh, sure. I have to say before I even came to the Twin Cities, my brother lived here and so I would come up in the summertime to visit him before 94 was built and they were just starting to build it. And there was all of this conflict going on about people who didn't want to move because they were by the freeway through, but they finally had to move. And that's how a lot of dispersal occurred. And so when I finally moved here and it's 1969, the freeway had been completed. But I remember when I come to visit my brother, all that controversy.

Maya Washington: When you think about housing discrimination, you shared a story about housing discrimination in Indiana and Chicago looking for housing. Could you share that story about what that was like? I think it was East Chicago, near Indiana, I think.

Harold Bridgeman: Oh, right. That was in Gary, Indiana. When I got married. When I got married my wife and I were looking for an apartment. And so we said, "Well, this is a nice apartment building." And it had, vacancies. And so we walked in and asked if we could rent an apartment. And they said, "No, they didn't rent to black people." I said, "well," and that was the first time I'd ever run into anything like that, and I said, "Well, Jeez, this is different." But that's the way it was. That there were certain neighborhoods where you could get an apartment. Others you could not.

Maya Washington: How did that compare to your experience or the experiences of your colleagues or friends in St. Paul? Did you encounter any issues with housing covenants or know of people who did?

Harold Bridgeman: I'm trying, I'm not sure about the Twin Cities because I didn't, it was never, it was never an issue. Although you kinda knew where the neighborhoods were when they were. But personally I don't think I ran into any issues myself.

Maya Washington: And, um, tell me a little bit about you and your brother's athletic background. I know he played football. Can you just tell me about how your brother influenced you as an athlete? And your love, your mutual love of tennis?

Harold Bridgeman: Right. Well, my brother was a very good athlete. I'm just kind of you know, a guy who just shows up, but he was a running back for the University of Wisconsin and had he not injured his ankle, he would have been in the NFL. That's how good he was but things happen. He picked up tennis as an alternative to football

when he graduated and I just went along with him. Because he was, you know, such a good athlete. And as a matter of fact, all my brothers were good athletes except me. I don't know what happened. I don't know. The genes broke down I think.

Maya Washington: And where do you fall in the ages?

Harold Bridgeman: Brothers, I had my brother who just passed away last October. I had one other brother who's younger than me, he's about nine months younger than me, and he still lives in Gary, Indiana. Then there's me and then I have a sister. And then my brother who just passed away. My sister still lives in Bolingbrook, Illinois. And so that's how it goes.

Interview with Stephanie Reid
15 September 2019, at 3055 NE Columbia Ave., Minneapolis, MN 55418

Maya Washington: So tell me your name.

Stephanie Reid: Stephanie Reid.

Maya Washington: And Stephanie, can you tell me your earliest memory of playing tennis?

Stephanie Reid: Sure. I remember my first introduction to tennis was when I was eight years old. My family had recently moved to a different side of town and our house was right across the street from tennis courts. So, I just remember going out there in the noon sun because that was the only time I could access the courts and playing, hitting the ball against the wall with my hand, pretending it was a racket until I finally got my own racket.

Maya Washington: And where did you grow up?

Stephanie Reid: I grew up in Charleston, South Carolina.

Maya Washington: And so in your community, was it a diverse community or was it a black community? How would you describe it demographically?

Stephanie Reid: The community that I described, I just moved to, it was, we were one of the first black families to move into the neighborhood. And when I said I couldn't access the tennis courts, it was because it was white people that were playing on the tennis courts and we weren't allowed. It was when, in noon sun time, noon of the day, when they were at work, we were able to sneak over to the tennis courts and play. So, it was also, that was, late sixties, mid-sixties, late sixties. So it was a time that was referred to as white flight. So for every black family that moved in, white families moved out. So over time it became a black neighborhood.

Maya Washington: And now when did tennis become a real passion and also a place of opportunity that led to your education. When did your skills improve to the point where you were able to get a scholarship?

Stephanie Reid: Well, the passion began early at, I mean even at age eight, before I had a racket, I knew that was something I wanted to do, something I enjoy doing. And I was blessed by having a person take interest in me at that age. So he noticed me when I was playing with my hand and the ball and [he] asked if I wanted to play. I borrowed a racket from him and took, I guess you would call, lessons. We played together and he showed me some things of how to play and [I] just grew into playing for many, many years. And then it turned into playing college tennis.

- Maya Washington: And what was that gentleman's name?
- Stephanie Reid: Mr. Campbell.
- Maya Washington: And uh, did Mr. Campbell work in the community? What was his profession?
- Stephanie Reid: I'm not sure what his profession was, he didn't work right in our neighborhood, but he did come directly from work to the tennis courts. I would stand on my porch hoping that Mr. Campbell would come, and every day he came and I would run across the streets and play with him. And actually just last night I was talking to my brother about Mr. Campbell, and he said that he just was talking to another friend and learned that just a couple of years ago, he passed away. So I, I wish I had known that he was even still alive. I would've reached out to him.
- Maya Washington: And what was his ethnic background?
- Stephanie Reid: African American.
- Maya Washington: Let's talk about getting recruited to play tennis in college and what that experience was like.
- Stephanie Reid: Well, it wasn't a true recruitment. I attended college in mid-seventies and that was right around the time where women were being involved in more sports. The college that I went to did not have a female tennis team, so it was in its infancy, the program. So I think I just went to the courts and they were about to include women in tennis and the coach saw my skills and asked if I wanted a scholarship and joined the team.
- Maya Washington: And what school was that?
- Stephanie Reid: South Carolina State University.
- Maya Washington: And was it Title IX that you're referring to you? Could you say it was around that time of Title IX?
- Stephanie Reid: It was around the time that Title IX was being in place.
- Maya Washington: And I'm going to be quiet this time and let you say it again and I won't talk over you so you can repeat that.
- Stephanie Reid: Okay. During the time that I received the scholarship, it was during the time of Title IX.
- Maya Washington: And as far as you understand what Title IX is, could you describe what Title IX was?

- Stephanie Reid: Well it was an opportunity for women to be involved in sports and it was actually a law, it was a requirement to include women in sports and give women an opportunity just as men had to participate.
- Maya Washington: And so while you were in college, can you describe what the competition looks like and who you were competing against and how, how you did?
- Stephanie Reid: Well, since the program was in its infancy, we didn't have a full schedule. But we did play, I would say about eight matches throughout the season and we played surrounding colleges-- colleges in North Carolina, South Carolina, went as far as Florida to participate, and we traveled by van, with the men's tennis team. And it was just a lot of fun. It was a lot of fun to, you know, carry your books and study on the road and have an opportunity to meet new people in play, and I enjoyed it.
- Maya Washington: And were the other schools in that league or on your schedule African American schools? Traditionally white schools? Or a mix?
- Stephanie Reid: The schools that we competed against were all HBCU schools, Historically Black Colleges and Universities.
- Maya Washington: And so were you surprised to see other African Americans playing tennis? Was it unique in addition to being women now having the opportunity to play at the college level? Did you feel as though it was unique that you were playing what had been considered a white sport? Or was that not something that was in your mind?
- Stephanie Reid: I, you know, since we were playing Historically Black Colleges, it wasn't a surprise that I would be competing against black women at that time. I understand now that at least with my university, it is very different. There are hardly any, even though it's HBCU school, there are hardly any black tennis players. They recruited actually out of the country for players for tennis at that university. But I think all of those schools were also early in their programs. So it wasn't necessarily an abundance of women, a full team. We had about six women on our team and other colleges had similar, maybe less.
- Maya Washington: And can you talk about any successes that you had?
- Stephanie Reid: Oh, well I was fortunate enough to play the number one tennis singles position, so that means I played the number one player of the other university. So it was just exciting to have that opportunity to have strong competition. And of course the payoff is winning and what that means to be excited about beating the best player at other schools.
- Maya Washington: To what extent did your family understand what you were involved in?

Stephanie Reid: That's, that's an interesting question because my brother who is next to me in age, he was the one that I played tennis with mostly. We went on the courts together and played and competed. He played in tournaments. I did. And with him being a few years older than me, of course I always wanted to be just as good as him or better. And then my other siblings were never involved in tennis. And because our home was right across the street from the tennis courts, my parents would basically sit on the porch and watch me play. My dad would come over sometimes and watch, but they never really attended any tournaments. They didn't come to the university to see me compete on that level.

Maya Washington: Now I'm thinking about when you came to the Twin Cities, what brought you to the Twin Cities?

Stephanie Reid: After graduating from college, I got married and my husband and I, my husband is also from Charleston, and we knew a friend, actually it was his cousin, that suggested that we come to Minnesota. So we were out of school, adventuresome, didn't know anything about Minnesota other than Prince and the Vikings. And we just decided to come.

Maya Washington: And about what year was that?

Stephanie Reid: That was in 1979.

Maya Washington: And so how did you acclimate to the Twin Cities or find a sense of community? Where did you first look?

Stephanie Reid: Church was the first place. Actually we were supposed to get married in December and decided to move the wedding up because we didn't want to move in the dead of winter to Minnesota. So the weather was one thing to get used to. And then I came from a community of mostly African American people and that was not the case once I moved to Minnesota. So we lived outside of St. Paul but came into St Paul for church and many other things. So I connected with, a Baptist church and that's where I met a woman named Lucille Bryant who introduced me to the MLK.

Maya Washington: And what is the name of the church?

Stephanie Reid: Pilgrim Baptist Church.

Maya Washington: And tell me about how Ms. Bryant got you involved in the Buffs, what that conversation was like when she discovered you played tennis.

Stephanie Reid: I don't remember specific details other than her being interested in my daughter. I had a young daughter at the time and Lucille loved kids. So I think that was the initial interaction. And then somehow tennis came in the conversation and she said, "Oh, you played tennis, you should come to MLK

Tennis courts. There are lots of people there that play." And that was very similar to what I grew up with. The courts back in Charleston. Like I never really had a partner after I stopped playing with Mr. Campbell with lessons, I would just go across the street, sit on the bleachers and wait until someone says you want to play? or I'd ask someone else to play. And then when I moved here it was very similar to the King Center. You would come sit, play for good. You stayed on. If you weren't, you waited your turn.

- Maya Washington: So since you had quite a bit of experience, did you find that you were able to win quite a bit or do you feel like you played as much as you stayed?
- Stephanie Reid: I think once you're competitive, you know you're always a competitor. So I, I tried really hard to make sure I was one of the people that stayed on the courts.
- Maya Washington: Can you tell me a little bit about what the atmosphere was like, if there was trash talking or socializing that went on outside of the actual tennis play? How would you describe that?
- Stephanie Reid: Well, going to the tennis courts at MLK, the atmosphere was lively. It was interesting where it was, it was competitive. People were interested in winning, but at the same time it was just about having fun and a lot of joking, teasing. You know, if you didn't have a tough skin, you probably shouldn't come down to the King Center.
- Maya Washington: And so thinking about the time frame, could you repeat again around what time, what years that was?
- Stephanie Reid: That was in I would say late eighties, mid eighties, late eighties into the 90s.
- Maya Washington: And so did you encounter both Tony Stingley and Mr. Greene or just one or the other?
- Stephanie Reid: Both. When I first started playing at MLK, Mr. Greene was one of the people that came and played. And I actually later joined the USTA tennis league and he was my coach along with Tunde. He was my coach too at one point, different tennis leagues.
- Maya Washington: And so since you had quite a bit of tennis experience, um, what were they able to offer you as coaches? Like, how did your game improve or change? Or if you were already at a high level, how did they support the skills that you already had?
- Stephanie Reid: Well when I was younger and learning from Mr. Campbell, he was about the fundamentals of the game of tennis. Like I can still remember him saying, you know, "get your racket back, keep your eyes on it. You got it. That's good." So we focused a lot on ground strokes and hitting the ball. And that's how I, um, I think I got my power from just playing a lot of ground strokes with him. There

wasn't a lot of strategy that I learned from Mr. Campbell that I got once I joined the buffs from Mr. Greene and from Tunde.

- Maya Washington: And kind of for someone who's not a tennis player, describe maybe one important lesson about strategy that they imparted?
- Stephanie Reid: Well it's just simple things about how to think during the game. I could remember Tunde saying, when I was in USTA matches is like, "You're playing the ball, you're not playing the person across the net from you. The ball is the same no matter who you play." So it's things like that helped me with the mental part of the game that I didn't consider early on.
- Maya Washington: And what was your profession during the time that you were getting involved in the Buffs?
- Stephanie Reid: I was an educator.
- Maya Washington: And what grade levels or subjects were you teaching?
- Stephanie Reid: At that time? I was a pre-K teacher or a second grade teacher. I taught both of those grades back then.
- Maya Washington: That's a big difference. God bless you. Thinking about the tournaments and things like that, tell me about some of the successes you had. Was it primarily USTA? Did you also do ATA?
- Stephanie Reid: Well, during that time, MLK sponsored a lot of tournaments. And I would play in the MLK tournaments. I played singles. And I also played in mixed doubles with a gentleman named Russel Knighton. And we were both very competitive and we were both very good at what we did. So, you know, like I said, it's always fun when you win. And the camaraderie and the friendships and all of that. Just as valuable as the wins too though.
- Maya Washington: Can you spell Russel's last name?
- Stephanie Reid: I believe it's R. U. S. S. E. L.
- Maya Washington: And what was the last one?
- Stephanie Reid: Knighton. K. N. I. G. H. T. O. N.
- Maya Washington: Great. And do you have any memories? I know you brought some trophies with you, so what were some big accomplishments or things where you won trophies?
- Stephanie Reid: Yeah, I remember winning, um, singles titles. Once again, mixed doubles titles. And I remember being in a tournament being played at MLK and it was my

daughter's either second or third birthday and her party was that day. And when you participate in a tournament, you're not sure how long you're gonna last in a tournament. So I planned the birthday party, probably thinking I wouldn't be in it at the end. I don't know. But my husband doesn't play tennis and I could just imagine what he was thinking home waiting for me to get back home for the birthday party, but I needed to finish the match. So I just remember winning that tournament and then going home excited about it and then sharing that with my daughter and her birthday.

Maya Washington: Very cool. And so did you do any USTA?

Stephanie Reid: I did, I participated in USTA tournaments, once again with Mr. Greene as one of the coaches and Tunde as a coach and other women that I've played with too. That experience was also fun. You had a chance to play with people beyond the folks that you might see at the King Center. I mostly played singles during that time as well.

Maya Washington: Did you ever travel or play outside of the state of Minnesota?

Stephanie Reid: Not for USTA play. We got really close to sectionals one time, but I never won a national title where you would travel and play a team outside of the state.

Maya Washington: And then with the ATA, any travel?

Stephanie Reid: I didn't participate in the ATA.

Maya Washington: Now what do you think is going to be the key to the MLK Tennis Buffs continuing into the next 40 years? What, what will it take for you all to continue this?

Stephanie Reid: Well, one thing that I've been really pleased about with MLK because I took some time away for raising my girls and other things happening in my life to come back to it and see that there's a new group of people that are very interested in having this continue. I see younger people that are joining the organization that are excited about it and that excitement has transitioned into action. The participation at the Selby Jazz Fest, signing kids up to have lessons in the summer. And it's just been a wonderful thing to see that as the people that were there back in the 80s, there are other people that are now taking it on and it's, and it's still going strong.

Maya Washington: How often do you play now? Do you get out still?

Stephanie Reid: I still get out. I have not gotten out much this summer, but I do have a tennis date for tomorrow at four.

Maya Washington: Excellent. And so how would you say tennis is helpful in approaching life or challenges in life? How does the game of tennis inform how you move in the

world or how you've overcome adversity or traversed your own life? How has tennis helped you with that?

Stephanie Reid: Well, there's so many life lessons that you learn in sports in general. But I just remember early on when I was playing, the self confidence that I gained from that. There were so many people that thought so highly of me because I was this young, skinny black girl and they weren't very many black girls playing tennis at that time. And so I would walk into a room, I think with a different presence because of tennis. Also it taught me how to persevere. You know, that practice is important. If you want to achieve something, you have to work really hard at it. And just the, the joy that you feel once you accomplish something, causes you to want to do something more. And those are lessons that you, that transitions onto other things beyond sports and tennis.

Maya Washington: And knowing that you're, you were part of the first wave with Title IX and then a lot of things, in the Twin Cities as a black professional and teaching and holding an important role in the lives of young people. And they've had you as someone to look up to at a critical time in your life: pre-K, second grade. What is it like to see the opportunities that young black girls have now in sports and in specifically tennis? Have you reflected on how far things have come? What are your thoughts about that?

Stephanie Reid: Well, my idol was Chris Everett. That's who I looked up to when I was playing tennis. That's who was winning the matches. I didn't have anybody that looked like me that was playing tennis. And I think when you have that, it gives you a belief that you can do that too. And so now with Coco Gauff for example, who had an excellent run at the U S Open, I think girls, and being 15, ,and being interviewed and just being available to young girls, I was watching the tournament and how they were like, "Oh, Coco." You know, it's just, I can see how it could instill a desire to do what she's doing or the belief that if she can do that, I can do that too. So whenever someone that has not had the opportunity to step into a place that has been held by someone other than you, and you see that? You have the belief that you can do that as well.

Maya Washington: Now, is there anything else I failed to ask you about as far as your tennis career is concerned or your family that's important to you to mention? I did figure out last time when you kept saying my sister in law, my sister in law, when I realized it was Miss Hattie Black that you were talking about, I made that connection?

Stephanie Reid: No, Nope.

Maya Washington: Maybe I'm thinking of someone else.

Stephanie Reid: Yes. I think you're thinking of...

Maya Washington: Who's in your generation that would be her relative? Was it Lucille Bryant Little?

- Stephanie Reid: I don't know.
- Maya Washington: I'm making it up then.
- Stephanie Reid: No, no, I remember Hattie but I'm trying-- there was a Helen Reed.
- Maya Washington: Maybe that's what it is.
- Stephanie Reid: And you know, we share the last name, different spelling.
- Maya Washington: Anything else to add or anything? Were your kids involved in tennis?
- Stephanie Reid: Both of my girls dabbled in tennis, but it didn't stick for them. Despite the strong effort that Lucille Bryant gave to get both of them involved. They played a little bit, but it wasn't something that they were as interested in clearly as I was. But tennis has just been something that's been a big part of my life. Something that I continue to enjoy participating in, whether it's playing or watching. And as I mentioned, it's something that's you learn life lessons from and it's a lifelong sport too.
- Maya Washington: And are you still a member of Pilgrim Baptist Church and can you just give me a sense of what that church community has meant to you and sort of what their place in the African American community in St. Paul is today?
- Stephanie Reid: Well previously I mentioned that when we moved to Minnesota, the church was where I found my community again. And I thought that was important, especially as I was raising my girls to find people that look like them that possibly shared the same values, definitely shared the same faith. And in my upbringing it was a community that raised me and I was looking for a community to help raise my girls.
- Maya Washington: Do you feel that Pilgrim still holds that role in the community today? And if so, how?
- Stephanie Reid: My girls have moved on. I know that there are families there that have deep roots that has been a support system for them that they count on for many things beyond just the worship time. So the black church has always been a place for refuge, a place for comfort. So I assume that that's true for many other families.
- Maya Washington: Would you say the Buffs was like a church for some people? Is that a leap?
- Stephanie Reid: I would say that the Buffs was definitely a place of belonging. You know, if you're looking for a place to meet new friends, a place where you could hone your skills, a place where you can, could connect and maybe even network. And just like I said, the bottom line is just a place to have fun and feel accepted.

Maya Washington: And how important is that for African Americans in Minnesota?

Stephanie Reid: Extremely important. There is, it's hard being the only in a lot of places or being the other and that can erase that. A sense of belonging.

Interview with Roz Batson
15 September 2019, at 3055 NE Columbia Ave., Minneapolis, MN 55418

- Maya Washington: Tell me your name.
- Roz Batson: Well, my name is Rosalyn Batson.
- Maya Washington: And what's your earliest memory of tennis? When did tennis come into your life?
- Roz Batson: Early seventies. I was watching, I believe it might've been Arthur, it was Arthur Ashe. But I think it may have been him winning at either Forest Hills or Wimbledon. And my mom said to me, "I think you can do that." And I said, "I think I can too." And so not long after that, I happened to have a classmate whose parents had rackets, and he said, "Do you want to come and play tennis?" And I said, "Yeah." So we went to the park and I played. We kinda hit against the wall and played with a racket that I had borrowed from him. And I told my mom about it and she said, "Okay, if you, if you want to do this, I'll get you a racket using S& H Greene stamps. And if you stick with it, I'll get you a good one." So that's how I got started in the game.
- Maya Washington: And where did you live at that time?
- Roz Batson: I grew up in Cleveland, so that was in Cleveland, Ohio.
- Maya Washington: Just so that I know that we got it. I'm gonna ask the same question differently. Who did you watch on TV that inspired you to learn tennis?
- Roz Batson: It was Arthur Ash. I think that was the first person that I saw playing that made me think I could play the game.
- Maya Washington: So you grew up in Ohio. When did your family come to the Twin Cities?
- Roz Batson: Actually, my family is still there. I came here in 1985 after college and my sister was here, so she was working for Northwest Airlines and I came here to kind of join her and look for a job, and I've been here ever since.
- Maya Washington: And what field did you go into?
- Roz Batson: Engineering. So I'm a materials engineer and I worked in the battery industry here when I first came to town. So that's what I've done my career here.

- Maya Washington: Okay. And so tell me about your evolution as a tennis player from your mom letting you take some lessons, and getting a racket to your playing with the Buffs in the Twin Cities.
- Roz Batson: Okay. It actually wasn't lessons so much back then. We would just go to the park and play. There were parks nearby back then. Of course kids could go pretty much anywhere they wanted during the day. And so it wasn't very long before myself and a neighbor who also kind of was getting introduced to the game, we would go to the park pretty much every day. There were also other kids there. And there were two parks with courts. They were actually clay courts, red clay courts, or we would call them brown clay courts. And in Cleveland at that time they were almost the same color as a baseball diamond. And so the park system at that time would put the lines on the baseball diamonds. They'd put the lines on the tennis court at the same time, but we played freely just hitting the ball against the wall.
- Roz Batson: There was a huge wall and we'd hit there. And then there was a local black tennis club called Forest City Tennis Club that members would also play at in the evenings. And so every now and then, one of them would take us aside and show us a little this or point something out to us. And so over time, some of us joined that club, which is similar to the Buffs only in Cleveland. And they, you know, we didn't really have formal lessons, but someone would show you pointers and take you around and maybe show you fine points of the game if you were interested. There was also right at that time, the beginning of what's called NJTL National Junior Tennis League that was just starting across the country. And that's a, like a parks program for kids to play tennis in the summer.
- Roz Batson: So all of us, several of us kids joined the local NJTL team, which had teams at every park site and you would play each other. So that was really the beginning of me playing regularly. Then I went to high school and my high school, had a tennis team. It was only an all-girls school and it only had one team of any kind, and it was a tennis team. So I played on that team. I didn't play in college. And when I finished college, I came here and I lived on Western and Laurel in St. Paul and because of my association with the black tennis club in Cleveland, I said, "Well, there's probably one here." And sure enough, two or three blocks away there it is, over at MLK. So I started going, that would have been about 1986. I started coming over to the courts and I was just this, you know, skinny gal that everybody told me how skinny I was at that time.
- Roz Batson: That was, you know, kind of a nickname. But I would always run all over the courts. I was always running. And I remember a couple things early on. I still had a pretty old school racket that I had carried through with me here. And the game had changed in the time that when I hadn't been playing much in college. And there was, you know, composite rackets and things like that. And one of the first things I remember, Sam King, one of the older members had said, "If you want to play well, you're going to have to get rid of that racket." So I had to get rid of my wood racket and get a newer style racket. So the game had changed in those times. And I, you know, I kind of did that. So I got a new racket and I kinda

started having to evolve my game a little bit from the older wood racket style to newer style.

Roz Batson: Cause when I learned that that's all there was, I changed my style but I played mostly singles and I still do now. I never was a strong doubles player, although I did play from time to time, but so I was known for always running all over the place and running everything down and running and you know, just a plan, a, a baseline type of game. So, but that's, that's the way I started with the Buffs.

Maya Washington: And so did you work more with Mr. Greene or Tony Stingley?

Roz Batson: I would say I was more in the Mr. Greene era. Yeah. Uh, so I didn't really have lessons from him, but you know, he was just another influence because, say one of the people that was a strong influence on us and gave us a lot of tennis guidance back in Cleveland, a gentleman named Mr. Jim Malone. Well, he was part of this whole nationwide network of black tennis clubs. And so at a certain age, they all knew each other. So Mr. Greene was about Mr. Malone's age. And I said, "Hey, do you know Jim Malone from Cleveland?" And he says, "Yeah." You know, so the same person that we had here as our big mentor, which was Ernie Greene locally, there will be one in almost every city, all over the country associated with a black tennis club. That was kind of a patriarch that, you know, there's like a lineage, you know, almost of these clubs. And so Mr. Greene was that, you know, for me here. So he was kind of part of the continuation of people that, like I say, they didn't formally give you lessons unless you really wanted them. They kind of just pointed things out to you and told you find points of the game, you know.

Maya Washington: So what was the atmosphere like on the courts in its peak? How often were you playing?

Roz Batson: Let's see, I would have played at the peak. I would have played several times a week over there, you know, cause it was a walk for me, you know, two or three blocks. So evenings after work in the summer for sure. I was over there two or three times a week, especially on the weekends. You know, Saturday, after about noon, really, you know, folks started coming and had the benches all full with all their stuff and music and people kind of talk and hanging out. Sometimes people would be cooking out there. So it was like going to an extended picnic really on the weekends. People had their coolers full of this or that and kind of hung out there. That was the way you spent a Saturday. Yeah.

Roz Batson: And you'd be playing, you play, you know, winner stays on, loser goes off. You might have a court with singles, a court with doubles, mixing and matching and doing whatever, you know. Just a way to hang out around the game on the weekends. So I sat on Sunday, it started a little later after church, maybe around two o'clock people came. And then during the week, also afterward.

Maya Washington: And so how important was this tennis community to your finding your way in St. Paul?

Roz Batson: Oh, it was big. It was very, it was significant because, you know, having spent all my summers of my teenage years in and around the tennis courts, I mean, it was back in Cleveland, it was all day sunup to sundown. That's where we were. And you know, my friend or my neighborhood friend who I mentioned earlier, she, and I've gotten reconnected recently and she still plays and we talked about how the, the fact that number one back then, it kept us out of trouble because you were around people that, your parents didn't even know them really.

Roz Batson: But I mean there were people that were about the game and they taught you things they looked out for you. So when I came here, it was that same atmosphere. And so it was like a family atmosphere. So number one, you feel comfortable, people are good people and playing a game that you love. And later I got through a couple of the club members, I got connected to the black ski club here, which is also a big part of my social network here. And again, people of like mind that liked to do outdoor things that were, you know, a way to enjoy these sports. They're all friends to this day, you know, and I just ran into Sondra, as she was leaving here and she, you know, it was just one of these people that, you know, good people that you knew and have known for many years.

Roz Batson: So friendships that started then are still here, you know, and again, for me as a single person here, I mean my sister was here, but later she moved. So as a person who didn't have any other family in the city it was, yes, it was the beginning of a network for me. And it was a network outside of work. Cause my job, you know, it was a very different scene in engineering. I had a very different group of peers there. And here was one, you know, that I had socially and started making my connections there.

Maya Washington: So tell me about the ATA.

Roz Batson: Okay, well, the club in Cleveland that I mentioned was called Forest City Tennis Club. In Detroit, you would have had Motor City Tennis Club. You had Chicago, Windy City Tennis Club, you had Crystal City that was Indianapolis. All of the clubs around the country and the ATA is really like a parallel tennis association to the USTA. And it started way back probably 1900s or earlier, and it was for black tennis players, similar to the way Negro leagues might have been in baseball. So Althea Gibson and Arthur Ashe and all of those, when they first started coming up, they would have started out with an ATA network like in Richmond or in Wilmington, North Carolina or wherever. And then as you got to a certain level, you would feed into, if it was allowable, you would feed into the main USTA tournaments, but their training and all of that would've been through this network of black tennis clubs.

- Roz Batson: So as a kid, when I first started in Cleveland, that club that I mentioned was an ATA club. And we had competitions with all the regional teams. So I was in Cleveland and within a three hour drive we had Pittsburgh, Cincinnati. You know Pittsburgh, Columbus, Toledo, Detroit. I think we went as far as Dayton. And then for regional things, we went to Indianapolis, Louisville, et cetera. But, I mentioned to a friend recently, we were kids. We were teenagers and we were the juniors of the club. And on a given Saturday, if we had a match, an away match, we would show up at the park and the club members would pick us up and we would go to Detroit for the day, play our matches, come back home. To this day, I don't think my parents had no idea who took us and don't, they never knew the people, but it was just that sort of an atmosphere of trust and just family that you could be in Detroit all day, away from your parents.
- Roz Batson: 13, 14 years old, playing kids from other clubs. And so that's how it was throughout the ATA. So, that's a huge network. And it still is in existence today. Later when I got pretty good, I participated in the nationals of the ATA, which were in New Orleans actually. And the closest I got was, actually playing in, in a tournament down there where Zina Garrison was in in the same tournament. She was a couple of years younger than me. But in any case, the ATA, you know, is just like I say, part of that network that you kind of came to expect was there for you. And then when I came here to the Twin Cities, like I say, I just kind of just assumed that there was going to be a group and sure enough there was, you know.
- Maya Washington: What successes did you have as a young person in tennis? Were you winning any of these tournaments?
- Roz Batson: In high school I played on my high school team, which, as I said, that was the only sport available that had competition with other teams. So our high school was pretty good. It was an all-girls school. We played other all-girls schools and all that. So I had success in high school. I played number one. Number two, singles. Didn't play in college. When I came here, MLK had a fair number of women playing league play and we had a women's team and I was part of that. So I played singles on that and we did pretty well around the Twin Cities. I paired up with some of the club members and played doubles in some of the USTA leagues here. So around there I had that level of success, I'll call it club level play.
- Roz Batson: I never did anything strong, you know, nationally. I never really got that far, but I was always a decent singles player and at the club level. And you know, still trying to hold it down as much as I can today just to keep, keep everything moving, you know. But yeah, our teams were pretty good. The MLK teams, we had women and men teams that played in USTA league play, and we always had a pretty good crop of players.
- Maya Washington: Can you describe what USTA league play is like?

- Roz Batson: USTA is the United States Tennis Association. So that's the main tennis organization that sanctions, all kinds of tennis tournaments and the US Open. And so all those tournaments that like Serena and Venus and them would play in, at a high professional level. They start down low and you have community league play, then you have college play and you have all these things that feed into the professional level.
- Roz Batson: So a league play is for weekend warriors or you know, just recreational players. It organizes teams just like maybe a softball league or anything else. So they have a level of play that's that type. It's almost at the recreational level you'd call it. And, but it does go beyond that if you want to really push for it. So what I'm describing is our success at what I would call recreational level play and around that, you know. Cause I mean these are folks that are working a job, you know, nine to five and then they play in the evening. So, you know, that's the leagues we were playing. And then we did well with that. MLK also did have its own tournament for quite some time. I remember several years, you know, they sponsored their own tournament right there at the courts and people across the community would come and play in our local tournament there.
- Roz Batson: That's something we probably at some point may revive again. But we had that for several years. Cause if I'm not mistaken, I think I have trophies from the MLK tournament. That was a big deal for everyone to kind of gather around. And you know, if you hadn't been involved in the club or got away from it, you would kind of come back for that tournament. Very similar to some of the other community events, you know, and I remember, you know, several of the members doing that pretty high level play too, for recreational players.
- Maya Washington: So coming to the Twin Cities in the early eighties or mid-eighties, as well as being a woman in engineering, and a black woman in engineering, what, if any, discrimination did you experience in your community or in your profession because of your race or your gender?
- Roz Batson: I guess I have to say that I'm a little unique. Well, maybe I'm not so unique. I, came along in technology and in engineering at a time when women were being encouraged to go into it, as early as high school. And I went to, like I say, an all-girls college prep high school in Cleveland. They were telling us, "Hey, you should be thinking about these types of careers." And so I had mentorship in career choices and all of that early on. So then you get to college and, yes, there were not a lot of women. But we were not the only ones, you know, I wasn't the trailblazer, so I never had to be the trailblazer in any of the areas I went into where it was nontraditional. So I didn't experience any discrimination that, you know, compared to what other people talk about because there was such a push for women at that time.
- Roz Batson: It was actually probably the peak of it because from what I understand now, a lot more girls are going into law or medicine or whatever. But you know, now they're actually trying to get the girls to go back into engineering. But back then it was the peak. So then within engineering, my field is materials engineering.

Now that's a niche field. It's not as common as mechanical or electrical or some of the major ones. It's involves, you know, it's kind of a hybrid of what used to be made up. Metallurgy, plastics, ceramics. They combine that into a degree called materials engineering. Well, that's a niche. And within that niche, it's so happens that there are a lot of women in that. And so I was never feeling like, "Oh geez, I'm the only one sitting in this classroom," you know, and all of that.

Roz Batson: So I didn't experience it there. I came to the Twin Cities and I got a job. I came here in October. I was started working in mid-December in materials engineering in my field in research and development, which you couldn't have fallen into anything better. And my colleagues there, you know, I say it was a company, it used to be Gould National Battery, but had recently become a private company and they called it G & B Battery. They make car batteries and they made all the batteries for all the Ford cars and others. So they were originally an equipment supplier to Ford and others, so it was pretty I don't know, maybe, I think by the time I left it was, you know, a hundred million dollar company, something like that. In any case, headquarters of the one division and their R & D was here.

Roz Batson: And I worked in that lab and I worked my way from a technician or entry level engineer all the way to head of R & D by the time I left. So in any case that was, you know. The only thing I would say was odd about me, yet, granted there were not many women and there were not many blacks there at all. My mentor was a black PhD, an electoral analytical chemist from University of Minnesota. His name is Dr. Fred Marsh. He and some of his contemporaries are some of the first blacks that came here from the South. They came to University of Minnesota cause they couldn't go to school in the South. He couldn't go to school in Virginia. His wife could not go to school in Alabama where she was from.

Roz Batson: And so they all were here. Well, sure enough, my first day on the job, that's who's there and who's my colleague. So, and still to this day, he's a friend and mentor. So I didn't have that hard landing at all, you know. I know, I was discriminated against, you know. I was in a niche, I was in a desired field and I was in an area that not a lot of people study. So they were, you know, anxious. Not only that, the odd thing that set me apart really more than anything else was the fact that I was young. Cause there, there was a lot of long tenured employees and I was a young kid. And so the young part was probably more of a distinction than being female or being black. And these guys they took me under their wing, like their sister or their daughter and showed me the ropes. And to this day, you know, I'm grateful for the way I was introduced to my field and, and so on. So, and then because it was engineering, you know, it's really more about what you produce in terms of your data and your work and your work speaks for itself. It's objective. And I never had a problem, never had a problem, someone, you know, cutting me off or this or that, or shorting me on this or feeling prejudice. I just did not experience that. And I'm fortunate and I'm grateful for that.

Maya Washington: And so why did you choose to live in the black community in St. Paul? Was it just that's where your sister was?

Roz Batson: Yes. That's funny. You know, when, when I first came here, yeah my sister was here and my niece was here. She was here with my niece, who was five. They lived in St. Paul on Ashland. I stayed with them initially for the first couple of months. And when I got an apartment, I moved a couple of blocks away. Not far. And I have to say that I loved the Twin Cities from the minute I set my foot here. Then, when it came, you know, I graduated, I was kinda thinking about where to go. And I said, well, I could just, I'm in the middle of seven kids and we were all scattered all over the country. And I said, well, I could just go and look for a job anywhere and be just another one scattered or I can go to the Twin Cities and be up there with my sister and then I'll look for a job there.

Roz Batson: So that's what I did. And also, you know, I was a Mary Tyler Moore fan. I kind of was curious about the Twin Cities. I had heard some things about it and, you know, I didn't mind winter cause Cleveland, you know, I just said it can't be much worse. And so I, I loved it and I was on the bus when I first came and I would catch the bus on Selby Avenue and go all the way down to Uptown and wander around and do things. And I just thought this place was terrific. I liked St. Paul where I was right in that neighborhood around Victoria crossing around Selby. You know, folks had told us how Selby and all of that used to be very different, but at the time I was coming in the mid-eighties, they were still hoping to re-gentrify it and all that. So I was at the cusp of that. So it was a great spot to be. And then here, you know, my tennis courts are close. My job was close, relatively speaking, so it worked out. But you know, I loved it. My college roommate was from Toronto and I had been there and I love that city and this reminded me of it. And so I was very comfortable in St. Paul, you know, from the time I came.

Maya Washington: So what is your hope for the MLK Buffs moving into, you know, this next decade of the 21st Century?

Roz Batson: I'd like to see it get, you know, I'm getting reconnected with the Buffs cause I had been away from tennis and from the Buffs for a good block of 10 plus years and kind of ended up coming back in the last couple of years. I can see a lot of areas where we can be more connected in the community. Known beyond tennis, you know, I mean tennis is the heart of it of course. But when I came it was also, there were several members that didn't really play much, but they were around the club because they liked the people and they like the social atmosphere and there was a social aspect to the club that was a little bit independent of tennis. And again, that goes back to that family community oriented feeling that you just automatically have when you're associated with the club. And I mentioned the black ski club that I was part of and that similar network to the tennis network. And when I was part of that, I remember everyone in the city knew if the ski club was having a party or an event, that was an event to be at and it was independent of skiing.

Roz Batson: Yeah. They might ski, they might not ski, but that group of people was part of it. So I would like to see the Buffs kind of resume that role in the Cities as the people to spend time with and to get to know because you know, of the type of people that are part of the club and to just broaden its perspective and that way that that would be, a hope of mine. And then, you know, just to keep the things going that are already going, which is great. You know, the community outreach and the lessons and the connection, with, especially the young people coming up, getting them introduced to the game.

Maya Washington: What are some ways that tennis can help you in life? How does the game of tennis inform your life? Or how might it inform someone's life? Or apply your approach as a tennis player to how you approach life?

Roz Batson: That's a good question. I think for me, you know, I mentioned earlier about tennis keeping me out of trouble at a critical time in my life. And so for me, there's some personal things. I know what was going on in Cleveland at that time and in my neighborhood in particular and so for me, you know, there, there was that aspect of it. But now, you know, many years later, 45 years later looking at what the game has done for me, number one, it did put me in touch with people who I felt had a positive and good outlook toward life. Maybe that, just the folks that I've been involved with in tennis, it grows, you know, you gravitate. Good people gravitate to the game. And those are the same people that, you know, I'm connected to now. People with the idea that they're going to keep themselves fit, that they're gonna enjoy the game. It just so happens they connect through tennis. So it's always put me in touch with good people. But as far as playing the game itself, it does require you to have a certain discipline and a certain concentration. And I never really thought about that before. But yes, some aspects of you honing your tennis game and getting your form and handling yourself on court, managing your emotions, managing your body, which is more of a thing now than it was in the past for me. Of course that all applies now. I'll be frank with you. I mean, the big benefit of tennis is fitness for me, maintaining my health. I don't do any other activity.

Interview with Riley Washington
15 September 2019, at 3055 NE Columbia Ave., Minneapolis, MN 55418

- Maya Washington: Would you please tell me your name?
- Riley Washington: Riley James Washington.
- Maya Washington: And can you tell me your earliest memory of tennis?
- Riley Washington: My earliest memory of tennis, I was probably 11 in Daytona Beach. There was a young gentleman trying for the tour. I can't remember his name, but this is before Arthur Ashe. He needs someone to play with. So he asked me to play with him and initially I said no, but then he came out every day. He asked me again. I said yes. So we hit all over the place. I kinda liked it but no interest really. So that was my first time playing at age 11. I played for a week, but that gentleman, he was really good.
- Maya Washington: So you had an athletic career, you were very athletic. Can you tell me some of the different sports you played during your school years and the sport that led you to a college opportunity?
- Riley Washington: Okay. Well, I played all sports growing up. I'm very athletic. I played basketball, football, baseball, ran track, and we had leagues down in Daytona Beach. So I played through junior high school. In high school I ran into a coach that, we had a difference of opinion, so therefore he blocked me from playing any high school sports. So I played sports with the adults in the adult leagues throughout high school.
- Maya Washington: And then, you were recruited to the NFL in what year?
- Riley Washington: This was back in 1981. I'd gone to college at the University of Buffalo and I was playing basketball really. And I was playing basketball in the gymnasium and the football coach walked into the gym, happened to notice the basketball players. I was one of the only guys running up and down the court going keep my eyes on the ball. He thought that was interesting so he stopped me and asked me to try out for his team. I initially said no. He came back again. He asked me again, asked me if I was afraid and I guess it kinda made me say, "Well no, I'm not afraid." So anyway, I went out, tried out for the team and made the team and the rest is kind of like history.
- Maya Washington: And so when did the draft happen or where, when were you scouted for the NFL?
- Riley Washington: Well, I played for the University of Buffalo, from '77 through '81. I didn't get drafted. I was a free agent. So prior to trying out for the Buffalo Bills, I went to

New England with the Patriots. I was in Chicago with the Bears and I had a trip to go to California, but it was too far for the Cowboys. So I was just sitting around playing sports, just kind of like working and then the Bills gave me a call, asked me to come out and try out. So I tried out for them. And I ran like a 4.29, 40 so that kind of woke them up. And then I had the tryout.

Maya Washington: And what years did you play with the Bills?

Riley Washington: '81, '82. So I was on a practice squad. I was pretty good at everything I did, but some of my teammates at the time, OJ, Richard McKinsey, Joe Ferguson the quarterback. Alvin White was a guy that played at Bethune Cookman in Daytona Beach, so I knew him. So they're all trying to get me to fake an injury because they figured I would get cut because I was from a small school and back in those days, in the seventies and eighties, if you had a big name school like Ohio State or USC or Notre Dame, you automatically made it. So, but I was so confident in myself. I fake the injury. I mean, ultimately that cost me. So they wanted to cut me. But they put me on the practice squad for a couple of years.

Maya Washington: What was your position?

Riley Washington: Defensive back. This was defensive back. I played punt return.

Maya Washington: When did you get involved with tennis?

Riley Washington: Well, when I was in the military, the thing that drew me to tennis as an adult, being in the military, we had sports, we had football, basketball, and track and field. So I did those sports. I was pretty much dominating those areas. And a friend of mine had played tennis in high school, but he didn't tell me that. He just challenged me, challenged me to a game of tennis. I told him no. He said, "Why?" I said, "because that is a sissy sport." So he called me out in front of the whole formation. I was a drill Sergeant. And so everybody's like, "Woo, Mr. Washington, backing down from a challenge." So I took that weekend we went and played tennis. He had two rackets. He beat me for the first month. Every day we played tennis, but he didn't know that. The second day I found this show on television through a guy named Dennis Vandemeer. He had a tennis show that explained all the ins and outs of tennis. I watched the videos for 29 days. After a month was over with, the guy never won again. So I ended up beating him. And that drew me into tennis.

Maya Washington: And what division of the military were you in?

Riley Washington: I was in, I was in the Army, stationed at Fort Campbell, Kentucky basic training in Anniston, Alabama. And I was there for three years.

Maya Washington: So where were you playing tennis before you moved to the Twin Cities? You were part of a tennis club in DC, was it?

- Riley Washington: No I started playing tennis in Buffalo, New York after I left the military. I was in Buffalo, New York, cause my girlfriend at the time was at Fisk University and she was in Buffalo, in medical school. So I followed her to Buffalo. And so being in Buffalo I played basketball and tennis. So they had a tennis league, a USTA. So I decided to join that and played tennis in Buffalo.
- Maya Washington: And so when you knew you were going to move to Minnesota, can you explain how you were told to go look for the Buffs? Can you tell that story?
- Riley Washington: Yes. As far as leaving Buffalo, I was gonna come to Minnesota for tennis and the elderly gentleman named Sal Westbrook, he's from Buffalo. He said, "Well, if you go into a Minnesota, maybe you'll see a friend of mine." I said, "Who's your friend?" He said, "His name is Ernie Greene. He and I played in several national tournaments together and we battled." Oh man. Okay. So he gave me the information to get to the Buffs center on Dale street. So upon coming here, I look for a Dale Street, but I went to the wrong street. I went to the Dale Street, out in White Bear Lake where I live, and there was no African Americans out there. So I said, "Well, I'm in the wrong spot." So I went back home, told my wife and her family, and they said "No. Dale street is in St. Paul by the MLK Center." So they directed me. I went down and I met Ernie Greene and Tony Stingley.
- Maya Washington: So your club in Buffalo, was that a black club?
- Riley Washington: Yes.
- Maya Washington: Can you tell me about that club?
- Riley Washington: Well, similar to the club here in, the Twin Cities in Minnesota here, it's in the park called MLK Park. So most cities have an MLK Park throughout the country. So this MLK Park was in Buffalo and people just met there. You play pickup tennis and once a month they have tournaments. So when I was there, I won all the tournaments there. So I wanted to continue to play tennis. So they directed me to come to Minnesota here in St. Paul for the, MLK Buffs here. And that's what got me going.
- Maya Washington: Could you say the name of the gentleman who made the recommendation for you to find the Buffs? Just one more time.
- Riley Washington: The gentleman that recommended me to come to the Buffs here in Minnesota, Sal Westbrook.
- Maya Washington: And how did Sal know Ernie Greene?
- Riley Washington: Sal Westbrook knew Ernie Greene because Ernie Greene and Sal Westbrook, they used to play in the national tournaments. It's called the ATA, which is the American Tennis Association. And that's basically for blacks because back in the

day they wouldn't allow blacks to play tennis with the USTA. So Althea Gibson, Arthur Ashe, and others came from that particular group.

Maya Washington: And so would you say there was a network of black club leaders who knew one another?

Riley Washington: Yes, those that played tennis. And those that traveled to the tournaments, they always exchanged information. So it was networking. So if I were to go to California or Detroit or Cleveland, wherever there's a MLK group in those cities.

Maya Washington: And if it's not called MLK, you know there's a black group?

Riley Washington: Yes. Most of them are called. Well you, they are all called MLK, but most of the recreational centers or MLK Centers. And then it may be call it something different, but they're all under MLK.

Maya Washington: What was your first impression of Mr. Greene?

Riley Washington: My first impression of Mr. Greene was he looked stoic. He looked calm, he looked confident, but he always had like a smile. A smile on his face. He asked you a question and then you'll just kind of wait for your answer. When I first met him, I was out on the court playing with the younger guys. He stood and watched me play. After we were done, he came on the court. I said, okay, I want to stand over here in a corner. I'll hit the ball to you. You go get the ball and get it back to me. Cause he was older but he had good hands. Good feel. He just ran me all over the place. In fact, the same thing Sal Westbrook did to me in Buffalo. I said I wanted to play. Sal Westbrook had a cane, he was lefthanded. Hold the cane in his right hand, toss a ball up, hit it, you get to him, he hits backhands and forehands from that one spot and could control the ball. So Sal Westbrook and Ernie Greene, they introduced me to like movement, control, how to kind of like finish points.

Maya Washington: And so what was everyone's first impression of you when you finally found the right court? How were you received? Can you describe what that was like?

Riley Washington: Well, my first day appearing at MLK in St. Paul, it was a Saturday. I got there probably around 11:30, 12:00. The court was filled with people and I drive up. A stranger. So all eyes are on me and I walked up and I just said to them, my name is Riley Washington. I'm coming from Minneapolis, Minnesota. Our friend of mine told me to come back and find Ernie Greene at these courts and I can play.

Maya Washington: Let's say that again? You were coming from Buffalo, New York, so maybe just say that again?

Riley Washington: Okay. So I came from Buffalo, New York. I came to Minneapolis/St. Paul. I went to find the MLK courts. And I went there on a Saturday. I introduced myself as Riley Washington from Buffalo, New York, coming and trying to find Mr. Ernie

Greene. And they said to me, "These are his courts. He's not here right now." But I did meet Tony Stingley. And so from there I asked, "Can I play?" Then I hear a lot of grumbling, you know, on the road going on. I waited my turn and then I finally got to play. They put me against one of the best players there and they all were like, I just heard him in the background saying this guy's going to beat Riley, you know, but that didn't happen. I beat the guy and then they all got quiet. So I made sure that Sunday I came in early, I was the first one there. So there was a line, I took the line like taking names? And beat them all.

Maya Washington: What was the trash talking like on a typical day? How much trash were people talking?

Riley Washington: Well initially they were kind of quiet about. Once they got to know me, they would say more like, stuff like, when I'd show up, they would say things like "If you want to leave now you can leave now. I won't tell anybody that you were here. Cause I know you're afraid of me." I'd just look at them and smile and Tony Stingley would have tournaments. We played tournaments. I'd win all the tournaments. So by the third year they had the tournaments, everybody was having to look at the draw to make sure that they were not paying me in the first round. If they did, a lot of times they would withdraw from the tournament. They didn't want to play me.

Maya Washington: Can you describe Tony's Stingley? What he was like?

Riley Washington: Tony Stingley was very welcoming, very friendly, very competitive, but he would do anything for you. And so when I first got here, he and I really kinda like seemed to see things eye to eye. So he and I became very good friends. I would go to his house, I'd visit with his family. His sons were younger, so I helped coach them throughout the, you know, throughout the years. And we became like brothers.

Maya Washington: And so what was Tony's background as a tennis player?

Riley Washington: Tony grew up in Chicago, Illinois or Iowa, some part of Iowa, but he was in Iowa and Chicago. And so as far as I know, he played tennis in Iowa and in Chicago and moved to Minnesota.

Maya Washington: How would you describe Tony's game? What was he like as a tennis player?

Riley Washington: Tony's game, it's kind of like a spider, you know, he was an all court player, so he had long arms. He still does, he's like 6'3. Long arms, athletic, big server, volleyer. Loves coming to the net. The backhand, slice and loved to try to set you up and then laugh at you.

Maya Washington: And so would you say how much of your participation with the Buffs was exercise and how much was socializing?

- Riley Washington: Well, socialization and exercise they come into play cause you're, cause you're on the courts for like a four-hour ordeal. So socialization was normally a lot of guys that are there that you knew and they were all on the same level. For instance, if I'm a 4.5, 5, most of the guys would be a 3.0 or 3.5. So because of the gap in the ratings, they couldn't beat me. But I would still go over because I enjoyed being with them. We would have a barbecue, picnics, and stuff on holidays and I enjoyed socializing.
- Maya Washington: Okay. So tell me about the tournaments. Were you participating in both ATA and USTA or just one or the other?
- Riley Washington: So my participation was primarily USTA. The ATA is a national tournament that was normally held in California. Sometimes in Florida, or it could be Virginia, Texas. So when I first got here, I did not go to any ATA tournaments. Not until probably 15 years, 20 years out. So I played a lot of local USTA leagues and tournaments.
- Maya Washington: And so what is, what do you think is the future vision you have for the Buffs? What will make all the difference for the success of the organization?
- Riley Washington: Well, I think the future for the Buffs, from my perspective, I would like for it to have more younger people involved from high school and up. At this point we have people that are my age and older and a few younger. So in order for it to thrive, we need to bring in more young people and have them, in my estimation, run the Buffs. Give them a hands-on experience then draw from their pool of people because someone 25 years-old doesn't want help from somebody like myself, some big age gap. So if those people were involved, they could probably attract more people in their age group and kind of like keep this thing going.
- Maya Washington: And so you have taken on some of the instruction of the young people or new members. Can you talk about your approach as a teacher of tennis to either young people or adults who want to learn?
- Riley Washington: Yes. My approach to tennis and when I go play tennis anywhere, I'm always trying to instruct or teach. MLK, when we have parties, occasionally we have some young people come in that aren't familiar with tennis. Either Tony Stingley or myself will take those individuals to the side and hit with them a little bit. It's very difficult for someone that's a 4.0 player to stop and train someone that can't play at all unless they have skills to offer. You gotta have patience because individuals don't understand how to hold the racket, they have interest in playing. So you have to make that fun for them. So many of them, I'm a teacher anyway by trade, it makes that job easy for me because I deal with people all day that are beginning in any sport.

- Maya Washington: So thinking about how things have changed since Tony moved to Florida, and in your sense, how has the organization changed or just the St. Paul tennis vibe changed since Tony moved to Florida?
- Riley Washington: Tony Stanley moving to Florida leaving was a sad day for me. And a lot of others. He was like the matriarch of this MLK Buffs. He did everything. You know, he was the president, he was the secretary. Any title he took on, he kept it going. He kept everybody calm. If guys thought they wanted to fight, he was there to say no and stop it. He had a way with words, his approach. He was just good, good people. So when he left it was like a, like a funeral of sort. But I mean the guys that are still here, trying to take over, but the whole MLK community the way they viewed Tony, it's like you have a great leader and that leader leaves and then someone comes in that's a possible dictator and people walk away from that. And that's kind of what happened with this, but it's still trying to keep its head above water.
- Maya Washington: Was he responsible for a lot of organizing of the tournaments? So what are sort of the structural changes? As an outsider it seems like you were doing more community-oriented tournaments or inner-community things. And now maybe not as many MLK Tennis Buffs organized tournaments? Is that an accurate observation?
- Riley Washington: That's an accurate observation. Since Tony was here, there were tournaments within the organization and he opened up to the general public also to get more people to come in and see MLK Buffs and maybe they would join. After he left there hasn't been a tournament since. He would get it together because Tony worked with the USTA. Tony has a lot of experience and wrangled those type of events. So he knew how to organize it, pull it together, talk to the people and they would get it going. So his, his skillset was such that he left the big hole when he left. Our person didn't like it when you left, but I understand you gotta do what you, he had to do what he had to do for his family and for himself and his future.
- Maya Washington: What year did he leave?
- Riley Washington: I think it's been two and a half, almost three years now.
- Maya Washington: And just a last few questions about sort of your experiences as an African American man, growing up in Florida, and coming up at a time when the country and laws were changing, and what was possible for black athletes and black people was changing. What was your first memory or the first time you understood that you could be treated differently because of your race?
- Riley Washington: I think the first time I can remember of being treated differently because of my race didn't happen to me personally, but in my neighborhood. I was probably seven years old and whenever the police came into our neighborhoods, they would rough up the men. And I mean it was never where they would talk to you

and try to reason. It was always rough. And then once you're in the back of the car then they would talk. I remember me walking through my neighborhood once at about seven years old and the cops come through the neighborhood and they pull me over and I'm like, "Yes?" He said, "Come here." So I walk over, they thought I was going to run, but I didn't. And so they said to me, I fit the description of the guy that just robbed the milk truck. I looked at him, I said, "Really?" I'm like, I'm seven years old. How did I rob the milk truck? And he just looked at me and goes, "So you're a smart aleck." Huh? I'm trying to figure out why would you stop me? I'm a seven year old kid. So that was my, you know, after that I knew I had to be different.

Maya Washington: So thinking about how things have changed now and you're seeing more African Americans playing tennis and we have some real superstars now, who in your mind are the up and coming superstars that are ones we should be paying attention to and watching?

Riley Washington: I basically pay attention to the female side of tennis. So the up and coming female tennis players coming up that have already shown promise would be Coco Gauff. You got a girl named Haley Baptiste. Another young lady, I can't think of her name.

Maya Washington: Naomi?

Riley Washington: Well, Naomi Osaka, she's already there. I mean those that haven't really struck gold yet. But yeah, Naomi for sure. Madison Keys, Sloane Stephens. In fact, Sloan Stephen's dad played for the Patriots when I tried out for the Patriots. That's when I met him.

Maya Washington: So, how significant do you think the ATA and or youth tennis programs were, or are, to the future success of who we're seeing have some of the limelight, whether they're up and coming or on the professional circuit? How important are groups like the MLK Buffs in grooming the next group of champions?

Riley Washington: In my estimation as far as the MLK Buffs or ATA Tennis Association, how it impacts blacks, going from there to the top ranks. I don't see it happening ever. Because the way this country is set up, whenever anything is good, they monopolize it. So the USTA has monopolized tennis in a sense that if you think you want to play tennis on a high level, get a scholarship, you must go through the USTA doors, go to the ATA, that pretty much blocks you from going anywhere else.

Maya Washington: Sweet. So we're just going to pick up on that thought you had about the ATA being a feeder to USTA or the college level and sort of why in some ways discrimination exists and the ATA is still maybe not treated with the same regard.

Riley Washington: Yes, the ATA being a feeder for the USTA would be a great thing, but because of the way the USTA is structurally set up, it's set up to levelize, to control. To control anything that's viable. So the ATA doesn't have the infrastructure set up, they don't have the athletes coming through. The ATA is just like Notre Dame. You would see Ohio State compared to Bethune Cookman, Florida and them, those kinds of schools. You're black colleges, they're trying to take all the funding from them also. So it's like they want to cripple you and you come through them. Same thing with tennis and any sport. That's life in the US.

Maya Washington: Do you have any last thoughts before we finish today? I think I asked all the questions.

Riley Washington: Well, I just think I'm hoping that the ATA can survive, but it probably will survive. But it will never be a feeder for the USTA. It'd be for more, more like for social tennis for the adults that want to play socially and just go and meet people from all over the country and just have fun playing tennis. But the skillset that is inside the ATA does compare to USTA, but that's how it works.

Interview with Tyrone Terrill
15 September 2019, at 3055 NE Columbia Ave., Minneapolis, MN 55418

- Maya Washington: All right. So tell me your name.
- Tyrone Terrill: Tyrone Terrill
- Maya Washington: Tyrone, tell me what your first memory of tennis was or when you first started playing tennis.
- Tyrone Terrill: My first memory of tennis is probably seeing Arthur Ashe, the first great African American male player win Wimbledon, win the US Open. And it was just, in many ways, not too much the tennis portion of it, but the historical significance of a black man, African American man, winning that tournament and how that, I think, springboarded a lot of young African Americans who wanted to play the game.
- Maya Washington: And so you have been with the Buffs awhile, but not super long. So tell me about what year you started playing tennis at the MLK courts.
- Tyrone Terrill: It started for me after I became St. Paul Human Rights Director and moving to St. Paul. And so Tony Stingley was my daughter Whitney's coach. And so she was playing high school tennis and Tony was actually picking her up from high school and driving her to tennis. And then Tony kind of got me involved. And so I probably started getting involved with the Buffs probably around 2006, 2005, somewhere in there.
- Maya Washington: And so if I'd never met Tony Stingley, which I haven't, and had to pick him out in a crowd, how would you describe him? So that I would know which one was Tony Stingley ?
- Tyrone Terrill: Tony Stingley is what I call a rare human being. He's nice to a fault. Dr. [inaudible] always says there's two--both sides can win. Tony always looked for both sides to win. And so he's a calming force. Particularly within the Buffs. When you look at the different personalities, you know, kind of a joke with the Buffs in terms of me and Riley, for example, Claude and Ray, which is an old movie with Martin Lawrence and Eddie Murphy. But Tony has a real calming force. I mean, and I would often say it is the backbone of the Buffs. I mean Tony made sure everything happened. And I actually, I was watching my son yesterday dealing with the young people and it was very reminiscent of Tony. But Tony has such a great patience with young folks. And that's teaching young people tennis is hard because their attention span. They want to go see their mother, they want to go play something else. But Tony had a way of always keeping them engaged.

- Maya Washington: Wonderful. And so it sounds like you got involved with the MLK tennis Buffs because your daughter was participating in some of the Buffs programming, or just working with Tony?
- Tyrone Terrill: Buffs training. Both Tunde and Tony were training her and then having her also at the high school level. And then I got involved with tennis. At the time I was already playing a lot more basketball and only had time for tennis hitting with the kids sometimes. But it was with Tony and Tunde than myself. And a good friend of mine, Trent Tucker, got involved with tennis.
- Maya Washington: Can you tell me Tunde's full name please?
- Tyrone Terrill: Oh boy, that's a tough one. It's Babatunde. So just Tunde. T U N D E.
- Maya Washington: Do you remember the first time you stepped out on the MLK courts and tried to play?
- Tyrone Terrill: Oh wow. Probably like 2004, 2005. But it was tough during my time as a human rights director because I had so many meetings and court time-- it's dark by six, seven o'clock. And so I really had no time to play. I tried to go down on weekends if I hadn't had, you know, some community events. So I'd say around that time. It was interesting because it was almost like a pickup basketball situation. You win, you stay on. You lose, you go home or you wait until the next time up. And so very, very similar to basketball.
- Maya Washington: How did your game improve from the first time you took the courts to where you're at now?
- Tyrone Terrill: You know, most people there were probably better tennis players than me. Uh, I just was a better athlete and so I'd run a lot of balls down, get more balls back in play. And I don't think I actually became a tennis player until about five, six years ago where you learn how to construct points, different spins, and really take advantage of, of knowledge of the game. It's a lot more than just hitting the ball hard and to learn how to construct points. And I give Tony and Riley a lot of credit directly. They helped me out a lot in terms of helping me improve my game.
- Maya Washington: Can you explain--you said there are different categories of player levels. A one or two, can you explain that?
- Tyrone Terrill: Well, I mean the USTA rates players, two, 2.5, three, 3.5, 4 all the way up to a seven, which is like Roger Federer. Actually they have leagues where you can be a 4.1 4.2 4.3. And that's a big difference in game from a 4.0 to a 4.5. I played in the league one time where I went 4.1 and one in a 4.0 league, moved up to a 4 or 5 league, now we're at 21 and 21. And so just a different level of tennis.

Maya Washington: And within the MLK Tennis Buffs, what would you say the range of players or skills is? Are you everything from an entry level, or rudimentary, to pro? Or what would you say that the range over the years has been of the quality of the players?

Tyrone Terrill: We've had a range. Our club is actually very strong and we don't really give ourselves enough credit in terms of how well we do. And so we have everything from, I would say probably a 2.5 player up onto the great, the great Riley Washington. I want to be sure that I say that on tape, who is a solid 4.5, 5 player. And so we have some very skilled players. I mean we have some very competitive games and it's a strong club and we don't really give ourselves, which has been proven by members from our club win in national tournament's in the ATA competition. So very strong club.

Maya Washington: Now thinking about the programs you offer the youth. What are some of the ways that the Buffs are creating opportunities for young people?

Tyrone Terrill: Well, yesterday we had the Selby Avenue Jazz Fest and we signed, signed up young folks for tennis drills for 2020. We do summer tennis lessons that will allow young people to come and play. They don't need a racket. There's no fee. And so we do that from the first week in June to the last week in August on a Monday night from 6:00 to 7:30 at St. Paul Central. And so it's our way of giving back. Could we charge? Yes. But I've had parents tell me, even for \$30 for a week of lessons, if I got four kids, three kids, that's \$90-\$120. That's food on my table. So it's the Buffs way to give back to a great game that we all love. It's free and very few programs are free and you don't need a racket, you don't need tennis balls. We provide everything with shoes and clothing. So if you come, we want to introduce, particularly young people, to this great game. Very few games can you play from four or five years-old to 80. I mean Harold Bridgeman is in our club, and is playing strong at 80 years-old and so it's a testament to how great the game is.

Maya Washington: Where does the funding come from to be able to be so generous and offer these programs for free and equipment use for free?

Tyrone Terrill: It comes from our membership. We have a single membership, our family membership, and then we do tennis parties during the winter. And so 6-7 tennis parties that we charge people to come and play. So we take those proceeds and put them back into the program.

Maya Washington: And so how would you say tennis prepares a young person for life? What are the life lessons that exist in the game?

Tyrone Terrill: think it prepares you for competition, teamwork. In any sport or any job it's about preparation. Too intense if you don't prepare for your opponent. But in terms of being prepared technically, bad technique, no matter what sport you're in, football, basketball, baseball. If your technique is bad, your game is

going to be bad. And so getting people into a good program at an early age, they are technically sound, then they're gonna end up being good athletes, good tennis players.

Maya Washington: How are you all currently involved in tournaments or how have you been involved in tournaments in the past?

Tyrone Terrill: We have not done a lot of tournaments as Buffs. We used to do Buffs tournaments, sponsored tournaments, but the last couple, over the last eight to nine years, we didn't get a good turnout. Some of the members didn't feel comfortable playing. Some of the members felt, "Well, there's only two or three people that could actually win the tournament." And that's probably the difference with a lot of folks that are Buffs. Players don't come from competitive backgrounds. And so the level to compete, sports makes you confident in what you do. That's why athletes make great employees. They come to work, they know about teamwork, they know about defeat, they know how to win. And so if you haven't experienced that, if you can't, you haven't played before 10,000 people, 20,000 people, then how do you secure the plate in front of 50 or 25 or two? And so it's about competition. So sports allows you to become competitive, but not just in sports but in life.

Maya Washington: And how would you say the organization has changed since Tony Stingley moved? It seems like you had quite a bit of tournaments and activities that may have changed or are just different now. How would you describe the shift?

Tyrone Terrill: It's changed a little bit in terms of some people move besides Tony. We have some new people that have joined, but it's more of finding the time. I mean tournaments for example are easy to do. So we'll do things like what's called world team tennis, which is not too much "my score," but we're on a team and you get five points, I get eight points, then we add that score together. So it's about who gets the most points as a team. Not so much, "well did Maya win," or "did Maya Lose" but if Maya got us four points, we still could win. And so we do more stuff like that now and then people play--our higher level players all play in leagues. And so people are, a lot of the time, involved in their own leagues, particularly from September to May.

Maya Washington: Can you describe what the league system looks like from an outsider's point of view, how would you explain the league play?

Tyrone Terrill: So whether you're at Fred Wells, Inner City Tennis, St. Paul Indoor Tennis, there could be a schedule that's put together, you know what your level is, and then you play that once a week and you get, you know, based on whether you win or lose, you rank first, second, third, fourth, or you could be at the bottom. But the good thing about leagues is that you play different people. Sometimes we get real comfortable in the MLK cause we play each other so much. You played somebody 8, 9, 10 years you know each other well. You know what's coming. But it also is a testament to the skill level of players because they still can make

your game very difficult. You know, you know, it's coming and you still can't do anything about it. But the leagues allow for different competition.

Maya Washington: So your children have been involved in tennis. Can you talk about basically to what extent your kids have been involved in tennis since 2006, since you got involved?

Tyrone Terrill: Well my daughter played at Hampton University in Virginia on the tennis team. And she used to laugh about it because she was, you know, they said they had seven African-Americans on the team. It was actually her and six girls from South Africa who actually weren't African. Or they are African American but they're not African American. But because of the legal definition it was always interesting for Hampton or any other historically black colleges to have multiple tennis players that are not African American. And so Whitney had a great experience at Hampton playing, cause a lot of those girls, particularly the girls from South Africa, they wanted to go onto the semi-- the lower circuit pro tour. They weren't there, they weren't there to get education, they weren't there to do all that. They just wanted to play tennis all day long. Whereas Whitney was there to go to school and get an education. But she played a lot at college.

Maya Washington: Tell me how Hampton found her.

Tyrone Terrill: She actually got recruited there from her school cause she was in high school in DC at that time, so close to Virginia. And so she ended up going to Hampton to play. And then my son was gonna play at Tuskegee and decided not to so he could focus more on academics, but still played a lot. And now he's back with the Buffs. He's one of the younger Buffs instructors. And you know, you saw a couple of them yesterday. Him at 29, Karl at 27, doing most of the drills yesterday, Tony Stingley drills they were doing yesterday. And so giving back, I mean it is an amazing game and I tell people all the time, as a two time all-state basketball player, I would still probably never have touched a basketball if I could've played tennis. Tennis is an unbelievable game. And so we did get more of our young people playing. It's a shame actually in many ways, but kids today play too many video games, spend too much time in the house. And so technology is a good thing. It's also a bad thing cause you shouldn't sit in front of a TV 8, 10, 12 hours. I know kids tell me they play around the clock and go to school on the bus and go to sleep. And so we gotta really get our young people out of the house.

Maya Washington: And so how does some of the African American women in particular that we're familiar with--how is some of the national and global attention that black tennis players are getting nowadays maybe going to help this sport?

Tyrone Terrill: Well, I think visibility of great athletes, whether it's Serena, Venus, two young ladies from Compton and if you've ever been to Compton. And Richard Williams doesn't get enough credit. I mean, most people don't know. For him to go into the gang ridden community of Compton, go to a library and take tennis books out and teach two young girls to become of course the greatest players ever.

And Venus is one of the greatest players of all time, but he never gets the credit. He never ever gets the credit that he should get. I sometimes want to choke Chris Everett because she never wants to give him the credit that he deserves. I mean, it's one of the most amazing sports stories maybe ever to think in Compton that you could do that. And they didn't play the junior circuit. You know, dude went straight from Compton to the U S Open. And so the Williams have given America a real introduction to tennis. I always say that Riley's two daughters, Taylor and Amber, are really like Venus and Serena on the Minnesota level, you know, seven state titles and Riley doesn't get enough credit in terms of teaching two girls to win seven state titles. They play division one tennis. and Amber is actually trying to--is on the pro circuit, trying to move herself up in the rankings. And it's just a great game.

Maya Washington: Did Riley's girls go through the MLK Buffs program? Can you tell me, can you basically just tell their story? Because I didn't remember to ask Riley that. So can you just say Riley Washington's daughters and then tell their story please?

Tyrone Terrill: Well, and I'd say Riley and Tracy. Give Tracy, you know, give Mom some credit. Riley put rackets in their hands early on, through the help with Tony, Riley, and the Buffs. They have trained those girls along with Tony's kids. My kids. So all our children kind of grew up in the game. And so the Buffs were the early instructors before they got more formal training, but Riley pretty much trained his girls. And folks have said, "Well some of his techniques are not..." They won seven state titles, so I don't care how good anybody's technique is, you can't go get seven state titles.

Maya Washington: Can you say his daughters' names?

Tyrone Terrill: Amber and Taylor.

Maya Washington: Can you say Amber and Taylor Washington.

Tyrone Terrill: Amber and Taylor Washington.

Maya Washington: And what years were they active? How long ago?

Tyrone Terrill: 23 and 24. So they started early--five, six years old. So 18 years ago, they'd been involved and connected to the Buffs. And exactly actually amazing to go out to Fred Wells and see Mark Stingley and Amber and Taylor and his wife, those young people that grew up in the Buffs hit and play so well. You know it's amazing.

Maya Washington: So now I just want to talk a little bit about your background. What brought you to the Twin Cities?

Tyrone Terrill: I am a former Gopher basketball recruit. So basketball brought me here when Bill Musselman was coach here and so 1972.

- Maya Washington: And so what was the Twin Cities like in 1972 and St. Paul specifically?
- Tyrone Terrill: You know, truthfully, we never came off campus. I think the one time we came off campus, they closed William's Arena down to have the floor redone. So we were looking for someplace to play and we just stopped the guy one time. I said, so where do black people play at around here? And they said South Minneapolis. So we get in the car and go to South Minneapolis and they say, well, we don't let Gophers play. So we said, "What do you mean Gophers can't play?" "Well, we're not allowed to come on campus and play, so you can't play here." And once we said, "We don't control the university. That's their rules.." they let us play. So we say, "Well, we'll split up." And they said, "No, you Gophers play together." We were beating them 15-0. Well, they said, "Well, y'all want to keep getting beat 15-0 we said, we'll split up." But that's how I got here.
- Maya Washington: And so how did you decide you wanted to have a career in civil rights?
- Tyrone Terrill: You know it basically started when I was nine years-old. I'd been in front of the television the night that the legendary CBS news anchor Walter Cronkite came on and he was crying and I knew Dr. King had been killed. And my mother always said that I stayed in front of the TV, probably for two hours crying. And I was going to do his work. And so at that time I made a decision basically as a little boy that I wanted to do civil rights work.
- Maya Washington: And so thinking about the civil rights issues in the Twin Cities in the 70s, what were sort of the key issues that you were hoping to move forward?
- Speaker 3: You know it's funny or not funny, but not any different than in 2019, we still have a major gap. Minnesota is the worst state for black people other than Mississippi. We have an income gap of almost \$40,000. The medium income for a black person in the Twin Cities is \$27,000. And I'm amazed that a family of four can take care of themselves on \$27,000. So when people often say we have a achievement gap, the gap is not achievement. The gap is economic. It's social, it's political. And it's culture. Because if I can't feed my family, if I can't buy a computer, I can't buy books. If I can't get them a tutor, then the playing field is not level. Any black child that comes from an economic base that's equal to white students who do just as well, if not better. And so not a lot of difference. We've changed, we call it different things, but from 1970 to 2019 the Twin Cities hasn't changed a lot. The level of racism, prejudice, and discrimination is still there.
- Maya Washington: And so is the economic discrepancy of a gap the result of discrimination? And if so, how are families encountering this kind of discrimination?
- Tyrone Terrill: Well, you encounter it no matter what you do. And when I say encounter it, I mean you go to a school and you can't, you're not welcome. You go into a restaurant, you're not welcome. You continually encounter some of the same things. You can't buy houses in certain areas. You know, red lining is supposed

to be illegal. There's different ways to do it. You price people out, you know, you can sell the houses at a certain price where you control who can buy that house. And so there is just so much still going on in society that we call it levels. We call it different things, but the bottom line equates to racism, present discrimination. And so you end up, and people say, well, the child struggles, but most young mothers don't get prenatal care. So that baby's nine months before it's even born. They get no early childhood education. So they go to kindergarten, first grade, they can dance, they can rap and do every song before academic preparation. When I talked earlier about sports, the team that prepares the best wins. So if you struggle from kindergarten and elementary school, high school is going to be tough, elementary is-- then you won't go to college. So each level becomes tougher if you don't prepare for the other level.

Maya Washington:

Now one thing I think that is unique about the Twin Cities, is while yes, there's extreme poverty or people who are working poor, who are working 40 plus hours a week to support a family and not earning enough. And yet there is also quite a number of African American professionals who have achieved some of the things that you've achieved and are working at top companies in the Twin Cities. Can you talk about why that is, why both are true, that you have this place where, African Americans are either getting their education at University of Minnesota or they're, getting educated elsewhere and coming to the Twin Cities? Can you talk about people like yourself and other professionals who came here?

Tyrone Terrill:

For probably every hundred athletes in the Twin Cities, whether it's Gophers, Twins, Vikings, maybe one gets a job. The other 99 don't. If you look at our four stations--four or five, nine, eleven...my good friend Robin Robinson was Female Anchor of the Year, 15 years in a row. And Don Shelby, he was the male anchor. You see very few if any, Robin Robinson's hosting four or five, nine at any time. And so we don't even get to do sports, not one sports anchor in this town is African-American. And not an African-American doing sports in this town. So athletes are, I did a thing many years ago called slavery in tennis shoes. And it's a modern day slavery. Yes. As long as you got an eligibility, as long as you can still run, kick, punt, jump, you're okay. But you tear up a knee, you lose your eligibility, then you're done. And so very few of these athletes have an opportunity to do anything outside of the sport once they're done. I'm doing a thing right now, a research on the number of coaches that are hiring their sons. The Vikings hired Gary Kubiak to be their quarterback coach. Gary hired both of his sons. So what he's doing, is making sure that that money remained in the Kubiak family. Tony Dungy didn't do that. And so there is too much racism. Even in the NFL today, you know, you have a league that's 70% black, but the level of racism is still there. And same at the collegiate level, the teams are 70% black, 80% black, but the players don't get a dime.

Interview with Georgia Ulmer
15 September 2019, at 3055 NE Columbia Ave., Minneapolis, MN 55418

- Maya Washington: Alright, so tell me your name.
- Georgia Ulmer: My name is Georgia Ulmer.
- Maya Washington: What's your current role on the MLK Tennis Buffs?
- Georgia Ulmer: I am the current president. This is actually my second term. So I've done two years and this is the third year. So I'm one year into my second term.
- Maya Washington: Okay. And I interrupted you. Could you say again what your role is?
- Georgia Ulmer: President of the MLK Tennis Buffs.
- Maya Washington: Thank you. Now what's your earliest memory of tennis?
- Georgia Ulmer: My earliest memory would be probably Venus and Serena. I wasn't really interested in tennis until recently. I got into tennis late, I got into tennis about 10 years ago. So, I remember seeing Venus and Serena, but I wasn't really watching tennis at that time.
- Maya Washington: And what was it about Venus and Serena that inspired you to play tennis yourself?
- Georgia Ulmer: Well, it was, they were different. I liked, especially Serena, I liked the way, just the power that she had when she hit. And when she plays, she just, she was just very entertaining. So that really interested me.
- Maya Washington: And how did you meet Mr. Greene?
- Georgia Ulmer: I never actually met Mr. Greene because I've only been with the club for 10 years. So really I'd say first time I met Mr. Greene would be online and through the current members. I just heard conversations about the club, about Ernie Greene and also read about him online and about some of the things that he's done and a lot of the things he's done for St. Paul. And just for the, you know, for the community.
- Maya Washington: And did you cross paths with Tony Stingley?
- Georgia Ulmer: Absolutely. Tony was actually one of my coaches when I started. Now I didn't start playing until 2010. I started playing just as another form of exercise. So a couple of years, well actually the first time I played a game I got hooked. And Tony Stingley was one of my coaches with the MLK Tennis Buffs. Cause that's

where I started. Came in, didn't know how to play tennis, didn't know how to play. I couldn't even hit a ball the first time I played. And now I play whenever I can.

Maya Washington: So can you describe Tony to someone who's never met him? If I had to pick him out in a crowd, how would I know, "Oh that's Tony Stingley?"

Georgia Ulmer: You would know Tony because Tony's going to be the one going around and talking to everyone and he's going to include everyone. If you can't play tennis, Tony is going to come grab your hand and Tony's going to make sure that you get in there. Or Tony will actually play with you.

Maya Washington: What was Tony's background as a tennis player?

Georgia Ulmer: Tony, I believe Tony has played since he was, since he was young. I think he's played like since he was 10 or nine or something like that, if I remember right. But I'm not sure of the whole thing, but I know he's played since he was nine or ten. And Tony's whole family is a tennis family. So they got an award from the USTA a few years ago, right before he moved on to Orlando. And their whole family is a tennis family, wife, kids, all of them.

Maya Washington: And so you kind of shared your impressions of Tony. What were his impressions of you as a new tennis player? What were sort of the main things he did to help you really develop?

Georgia Ulmer: Tony was good on technique. So for me the big thing, just the foundation for tennis player would be follow through and you don't think that that's important, but it is the most important thing to do is to follow through on your shot because you, for me, I felt like I should just hit the ball where I want it to go. But following through on the ball actually gives you some spin and, and actually makes it stay in the court versus hitting out. And that was my big thing, hitting it out. So Tony was really good on technique and that, I'd say that was the big thing. Just good form, good technique.

Maya Washington: Who introduced you to the fact that there was tennis at the MLK courts? Was it something you were always aware of as a St. Paul resident or did someone invite you to come for the first time?

Georgia Ulmer: No, I actually got invited through Tyrone Terrill who is now the secretary. He was a friend of a friend, so he would tell me that the, they'd always have, they had lessons, or they had free lessons. And I was interested in it as a form of exercise just to complement my gym workout. And I went in 2010. And that was, he was actually one of my coaches also. He, Tony Stingley and Riley Washington were the coaches at that time. So I just stayed. I did a couple years of lessons with them, played my first game at St. Paul Central with them. I couldn't hit the ball. The ball would go right by me and, and I would just stand there. But I just kept at it. It was a challenge for me, so I just kept at it.

Maya Washington: And so how would you describe what the atmosphere is like? For those who are just learning how to play tennis or for those who have a great deal of experience, how would you describe the energy around the MLK Tennis Buffs as an organization?

Georgia Ulmer: The energy would be, there's a lot of, there's a lot of people that are willing to help you out with your game. I think there's always, like, for me, I would always tell somebody to move their feet and follow through because those are the things that I fell short on and until I actually started doing it. I actually saw my game improve once I started doing it.

Maya Washington: In terms of what you all do or what you have done in the past 10 years around tournaments, can you tell me how you interact with other organizations nationwide and compete?

Georgia Ulmer: Well there's ATA, which is the African American organization that was founded because, back in the day, black people couldn't play on the regular circuit. So they were formed and they're still there now. There's a lot of people that play in their tournaments, but we don't necessarily interact with other organizations at this point. But a lot of people play in those tournaments. I know Tony Stingley and Riley Washington actually went down. I know they won doubles, I can't remember what year, but they won. They took first place. So that was pretty exciting.

Georgia Ulmer: And then what tournaments have you been involved in, if any?

Georgia Ulmer: I have been involved in, well I play USTA now. MLK Tennis Buffs had a tournament, I'd say right before Tony left, it was world team tennis, WTT, style. So it's a style where it's mixed men and women. It has basically, after deuce you win the game so you don't have to go this "add deuce, add deuce." I played in that and our team didn't win. I think we lost by like a point. Tony's team won and I was on Riley's team. But that was fun. I play USTA now. In 2017 I actually went to nationals and we brought home a third place trophy. So that was pretty exciting.

Maya Washington: That's very exciting. Yeah. And what category was your team under?

Georgia Ulmer: It was actually the 55 Plus team and it was in Orlando, Florida. And we came in third after North Carolina and California, which is two teams that get to play year round and we don't, so I think that's pretty good.

Maya Washington: And that's USTA? What ways are you all involved with young people in exposing them to tennis or, partnering with or collaborating with Urban Tennis?

Georgia Ulmer: We have a program in summertime, which are the lessons that I started with. We have free lessons for the community and it's from kids ages, I think it's five or six to adult. And it's a nice program because it's free. You just have to let us

know each week if you're going to come so that we can sign you up and have enough instructors for the day. The kids can play on one court and the adults are in another court. So it's a perfect, a perfect environment for, you know, for families. And we oftentimes have that. We have the kids, we've had the mother and father on the other courts playing and we have the kids playing on another court. And they kind of get to see each other sometimes when they have water breaks, they get to see each other and they get to talk to each other. But yeah, that and that has been going on since Ernie Greene, I believe that's been going on since the 70s. I don't know if it's always been at St. Paul Central, which are the Bucky Olsen courts.

Maya Washington: Are you familiar with how Urban Tennis as a separate entity intersects with the work that you do?

Georgia Ulmer: Okay. You know, they're a different organization. I know that Ernie Greene had either started it or was involved in it, but we don't really do anything cause we pretty much do the same. But we different clients or you know, say clients or different players.

Maya Washington: So is it more of a demographic thing? What youth are you serving in the St. Paul community?

Georgia Ulmer: Well ours are right in the city. Community members. And here's the thing with, with us, it's different from St. Paul Urban Tennis is we actually live in the community. I grew up in the community and so we just had a Jazz Fest yesterday, and I couldn't eat my food for hugging people, because I know everybody. It's right there on Selby. It's where I grew up, my old stomping grounds and I couldn't even eat my food because everybody kept coming by our tennis booth hugging me. And so those are the people that we're going to have next summer in our group. They know us. Last year I wasn't at the Jazz Fest and people were asking about me. They were coming to me saying, "Well I was asking where were you last year." I had to work. But they were saying, "I didn't see you at the tennis booth." Because we have the tennis booth every year. So I think they're probably more community players. St. Paul Urban I'm sure has the community players also but more families probably know us and not necessarily know us actually. We don't know all of them, but we get to know them.

Maya Washington: So what do you think of the ways that young people now, when you look at tennis and you look at the most recent Open, how many young black women got some limelight, what do you think what's happening now will do for the future of tennis in black communities?

Georgia Ulmer: Well, I think just like with me, I think it's planting, definitely planting a seed. We had one young lady stop by our booth yesterday that was, I think she was about 12. She's already playing and it showed, she was very good. It showed. So one of the coaches said, "She looks just like Coco." So I think that it's planting a seed just like Serena and Venus did for me, although it took me much longer because

at that point I was an adult. But I think it's planting a seed and it's letting them know that this is okay. I think historically our culture goes to football, basketball, track. I was, I ran track and I had to say to myself, I wish I had played tennis in high school but I think it definitely plants a seed and it's looks a little more exciting.

Maya Washington: What is your vision for the Buffs into the future? There's this great, sounds like a 40 plus year history. Where do you see the MLK Tennis Buffs in 10 years, or 40 years?

Georgia Ulmer: Well, see I'm a native St. Paul person. I would love to see it grow. Definitely we want to bring in younger people because at some point we're, you know, we're all aging and we're not going to be able to keep the Buffs going and we'd like to have, you know, we'd like to have a legacy, we'd like to have younger people. So I think the big thing for us to do, to keep the organization going is to just make it exciting for the younger people. And that's younger from six year-olds on up to adults, even adults. 20, 30, 15. I think those are the people that we want to come and take over from what we're, we're doing.

Maya Washington: Kind of backtracking, we talked about Coco, could you name a few of the, tennis influencers that you think are going to inspire the next generation? Could you just list a few in your mind you think will have an impact?

Georgia Ulmer: I definitely think Coco for sure. She already has. I think she got what, on Instagram overnight, like some thousands, 10,000 I don't know, 20,000 new Instagram followers. Naomi Osaka, definitely. And you know, I'm not sure. I don't really know this, the one that just won and I don't even know her name. She just won the US Open, that beat Serena. Everybody seems to beat Serena lately cause that's a place to aspire to. But I think she's going to be good. And Halep. Halep definitely is. She goes from one to four, but Halep is definitely no one to scoff at. She's a strong player. Strong player.

Maya Washington: You're a native St. Paulien. If I'd never been to St. Paul, ever, what would you say to describe what the St. Paul of the 60s, 70s, and 80s was like for the black community? How would you describe it for someone who'd never seen it or heard about it?

Georgia Ulmer: Well, I would say in the 60s it was definitely very community-oriented because at that time, it was, well it was Rondo. It's still Rondo to me. It was definitely very family, very community oriented. We always lived in a house. We went to school in our area. There were nice schools. 70s I'd say, I was in more junior high school, so we ventured out a lot more, but we still had the community there. I went to a school called Mechanic Arts and all the community people were at that school. It was a mixture. The people that came from the elementary schools went on to the junior highs and it was a junior to senior high school. So it was definitely still people that I know and as a matter of fact, people that I saw yesterday at the Jazz Festival were people that went to that school.

- Georgia Ulmer: So it was definitely 60s and 70s are definitely community-oriented. I went on from Mechanic Arts. I went to St. Paul Central because Mechanic Arts closed, so I had to go to St. Paul Central and St. Paul Central is where I graduated from. Again, even in the 70s, I graduated in '79, so it's still in the 70s at Central. It was still a big community school even though they had schools within the schools and the school was huge. It's totally different than what it was. I actually graduated-- we were the last class to graduate in the old school, so we had to go through all the construction. But it was definitely still community-oriented, I'd say towards the 80s and 90s. And that's probably why, by about the time that I moved out to or went off to college it changed a little more and I, I will have to say at that time, growing up in the 60s, 70s and 80s, there weren't sports or different programs that took you out of your community.
- Georgia Ulmer: Everything was in the community. Everything I did was at in the community. I used to play at Hallie Q. Brown, which is now Martin Luther, part of Martin Luther King. But at one time when we stayed on Fuller, Hallie Q. Brown was behind me and we used to go a block and just play and jump on the trampoline. Play in the gym. We used to do everything and then they became, I guess once Rondo was there are, I think it was in the 70s actually, they combined with Martin Luther King Center, which is where they are right now. But at one point they were just by themselves in a building on Aurora.
- Maya Washington: As a child, were you aware that black people were playing tennis at those courts? Did you ever notice that?
- Georgia Ulmer: No. No, not at all actually. Well, probably in the 70s I would say I was a child in the 60s so in the 60s, Martin Luther King Center wasn't there. Martin Luther King Center was built in the 70s, and I actually, I don't have it now, but I have a picture of myself and some classmates that went there. Like when it first opened, we have our little parka jackets on, but that wasn't really there. There were houses there and, and there was, right where the school is right now, those were all black businesses. And I used to get my hair press and curl at a barbershop, well, not barbershop, a hair shop, I forgot what they were called. Beauty shop, at that time. It was a black, a black beautician and she used to press and curl my hair. So those were houses. We used to have my aunt, they were the Scarboroughs. They had 10 people in their family, 10 brothers and sisters.
- Georgia Ulmer: They had a house right on Kent right there. So the King center hasn't always been there. It's definitely changed. And I did not know that they were playing tennis, even when the Buffs were there in the 70s. I didn't know. I didn't, I was too busy just going in the gym playing or going down to Oxford, which is now Jimmy Lee, but it was Oxford there and I still call it Oxford.
- Maya Washington: Now. Is there anything that you'd like to share that maybe I failed to ask about or you think is important about the MLK Tennis Buffs history or the experiences of blacks living in St. Paul that you think is important or relevant before we

wrap? I would say, well, I think historically the Tennis Buffs has been a male dominated organization.

Georgia Ulmer: Which makes sense because Ernie Greene started it. So I'm sure he had his friends or people that he knew. And there were a lot of women that played at the time. I am a female president, so I think that says a lot about the organization now. I mean I think they've always reached out, but just the fact of that happening, I think is, it says a lot about the organization. They want to be inclusive. I think they're just a great organization for St. Paul.

Maya Washington: And one last thing that I do want, because I appreciate your shouting out history. Could you just state sort of what you accomplished in track as a high schooler, and sort of that peak of your track career in high school?

Georgia Ulmer: Okay. Yeah, I will. I started running track in seventh grade at Mechanic Arts, but I went on to Central. In 1978 we won the state championship. The girls' state championship. And in that same year we had a 400, 4X100 relay that broke the record and held the record for 19 years. I think Woodbury High School broke our record after 19 years. So that was, that was fun. That was really fun. And the people that were on there were Kim Watts. She started it off. Dana Watts. She was number two. She handed off to me. I was third leg and then Deline Hawkins brought it in. So that was very exciting.

Maya Washington: And did you run track in college?

Georgia Ulmer: I did. I ran track in college for a year. I went to Golden Valley Lutheran college and, actually Flip Saunders was the basketball coach at the time and I was also a cheerleader. So yes, I went on there, or went to Golden Valley Lutheran College and ended up at Metropolitan State University and that's where I graduated from.

Archival Materials

Biographical text from sign commissioned by the MLK Tennis Buffs, Inc. for the Ernie “Duke” Greene Tennis Courts, Mackubin and Iglehart, Saint Paul:

Ernest A. Greene was born on December 15, 1918 in Cape May, New Jersey. He met his future wife Edith, to whom he would be married for 58 years, while attending Hampton University, in Hampton, VA. He served in the Army and was a SSGT in WWII. He moved to St. Paul in 1946, earned a B.S. degree at the University of Minnesota, and began his career as an Assistant Scientist in the U of M’s Physiology Department.

Ernie “Duke” Greene was dedicated to the development, promotion, and playing of tennis in the Saint Paul area since 1956. He started tennis lessons for youth in 1972 at the Martin Luther King Recreation Center and in 1973 founded the Martin Luther King Tennis Buffs Inc., an organization dedicated to giving youth and adults from the inner city the opportunity to learn and play the game of tennis.

Duke’s career included numerous recognitions and awards from Northwest Professional Tennis Association: Player of the Year in 1982, Coach of the Year in 1987, and Pro of the Year in 1993. In 1994 he received the United States Professional Tennis Registry Humanitarian Award. Ernie’s playing career included being ranked #1 in the NWTA Men’s 55 and Over age group from 1975-78 and #1 in the Men’s 60 and Over division in 1979-81. He captured four National Public Parks Championships, nine NWTA Sectional Singles Championships, five American Tennis Association Men’s Singles titles, and two Doubles titles in his age group. He was inducted into the NWTA Tennis Hall of Fame in 1997, the first African American to receive this honor.

Among Ernie’s many commitments to his community in St. Paul was serving as the President of the Hallie Q Brown Community Center, Inc. Board of Directors. He also was one of the driving forces of the St. Paul Urban Tennis organization and their mission in our community.

“Mr. Greene is a legend in tennis not only in the Twin Cities, but also across the United States. Ernie's accomplishments far transcend the tennis court. He has used tennis to help many young people and adults in every phase of life.” (Tony Stingley, USTA National Manager) "In all his activities Ernie was recognized as a man of complete integrity and compassion for others." (Stan Shepard, former doubles partner.)

Mr. Greene's Farewell Message to the MLK Tennis Buffs

Ernest "Duke" Greene passed on May 31, 2002. When he knew his time was growing short, he sent the following message to the MLK Tennis Buffs:

A good teacher relies on feedback from his or her students and everyone can learn from everyone else, and so my life has been enriched from my association with each of you. I've been truly blessed, and in my own way I hope I have enhanced and helped each one of you. I thank God for allowing me to be in your presence and for the opportunity to know you and hopefully improve your tennis game.

With untold love and respect,

Love, Ernie



Ernie "Duke" Greene

Twin City Tennis Club, 1924–1928

The MLK Tennis Buffs Club was founded in the mid-70's in the neighborhood now known as Old Rondo, memorializing the avenue that was obliterated in the 50's and 60's as construction of I-94 drove through the heart of St. Paul's black community. Through the activities of the MLK Tennis Buffs, the courts at Mackubin and Iglehart streets, part of the MLK Recreation Center that opened in 1972, became the focus of tennis education, competition, and socializing for the community. As documented in the preceding interview transcriptions, these activities have continued to the present day.

Fifty years before the founding of the MLK Tennis Buffs, however, another African American tennis club was organized in this same neighborhood. A yellowing, cardboard-covered secretary's notebook in the archives of the Minnesota History Center's Gale Family Library documents that otherwise-forgotten organization, which voted on May 14, 1924, "after much discussion," to name itself the Twin City Tennis Club.

The club secretary who took most of the minutes recorded in the notebook was Alverta Phillips Coram. (Alverta Coram was the mother of Kathryn Coram Gagnon, one of the narrators in the oral history collection *Voices of Rondo*.) Some of the club's meetings were at Alverta Coram's home, 495 St. Anthony Ave, St. Paul.

At the May 14, 1924 meeting, the club agreed to lay out their courts in the Hollow, an open area (just a half block west of the Coram home) bounded by St. Anthony Ave, Kent St., Central Ave., and Mackubin St., where there were playing fields in the summer and an ice skating rink in the winter. The club was charged \$25 to lease the grounds for the courts, and the city agreed to provide a road scraper and roller to prepare the area. By the July 2, 1924 meeting, the courts were apparently almost ready to be played on, and a formal opening was discussed. At that meeting, they decided to use chalk to mark the lines instead of tape, and proposed \$.50 monthly membership dues. Below are some excerpts from later meeting minutes, which might give a little sense of the life of the club.

From minutes for August 5, 1924:

. . . . Mr. E.A. Carter, chairman of the grounds committee, reported on the following work: the completion of one court and the second one practically finished. Mr. Carter stated that the service of six or eight men would be sufficient to have a presentable piece of ground, that is by cutting the grass and [fixing?] the benches. . . .

At this meeting, Mr. Carter also spoke about hosting tournaments, entering in other club's tournaments, and adding another prize cup, at the cost \$18.50, to the one already donated by "an Urban League member."

From minutes for April 16, 1925:

The meeting of the T.C.T.C. was called to order by the Pres. Earl F. Kyle, at the Y.W.C.A. Branch The Pres. reported that he had talked with Mr. Krantz owner of the Hollow Rink who is willing to allow T.C.T.C. use the Hollow again this year if the balance of \$15 due from last year is paid. He is planning to have six or eight loads of gravel put on the ground to keep down the weeds. Mr. Leon Smith suggested that the

T.C.T.C. give a matinee dance at Union Hall on Decoration Day, if the hall be available. Mr. Mundell was deputized to secure hall, which he did by a telephone call to Mr. George (?) Hoage (?). Mr. Leon Smith was appointed Chair of the Dance Committee to be assisted by Miss Mary Lealtad and Miss Gladys Gardner. Mr. Mundell moved that \$5.00 be appropriated for deposit on the hall. . . . Pres. Earl Kyle suggested that a membership campaign be carried on among the younger girls and boys. It was moved by Mr. Smith and seconded by Mr. Mundell that old members be reinstated by payment of \$1.00. Mr. Smith was instructed to secure best available orchestra for Decoration Day Dance. Stevens' Orchestra if possible. . . .

From minutes for April 23, 1925:

. . . . Mr. Mundell was asked to get prices on backstops. It was moved by Mr. Mundell and seconded by Mr. Bufkins that the dues shall be \$.25 a month, starting May 1. The motion was carried. . . .

From minutes for April 30, 1925:

. . . . The Pres. appointed Mr. Mundell and Mr. Carter a committee to approach Mr. Krantz over getting the grounds immediately and paying last year's bill after the Dec. Day Dance, instructing Mr. Mundell to learn if possible how soon Mr. Krantz intended to put gravel on rink. . . .

From minutes for May 6, 1925:

. . . . Mr. Mundell reported the prices on backstops: Cord at \$4.55, and wire netting at \$7.22. Dr Crump reported that he had secured promise from the City Engineer to roll the Hollow when the roller will be in that vicinity for purpose of grading Central Ave, if we get in touch with him at that time. It will take several hours to roll the Hollow and will cost \$3. an hour. Motion was passed to have a committee appointed to measure the grounds and to get exact information on the space available for courts. Francis Bufkins was appointed to measure Hollow. . . .

From minutes for May 14, 1925:

. . . . [Pres.] Earl Kyle gave a partial report for the Dance Committee. Stevens offers 5 pieces orchestra at \$32. Kyle was requested to inform Mr. Stevens that their former (1924) price of \$28 was more agreeable to the club. Kyle reported that it might be possible to get posters made very reasonably by some High School boys. Mr. Mundell reported that in a telephone conversation with Mr. Krantz the latter had stated that he is anxious to get the gravel on the rink but the conditions of the street makes that impossible at present. The T.C.T.C. may however immediately put up courts and play until gravel is put on grounds. He, Mr. K., is putting a lock on the gate.

Mr. Mundell informed the Club that the roller was not returned to Mrs. England last Fall. She sent detectives to Mr. Carter's office this Spring to get her roller back. Mr. Mundell suggested that a committee be appointed to approach Mrs. England to try to get the use of the roller again. Mr. Mundell and Kyle were appointed to see Mrs. England on Fri. afternoon May 15th and afterwards with the assistance of any other young men available are to put down two courts.

Miss Gladys Gardner reported for the Dance Committee, as Chair Leon Smith is out of town. Checking will be \$.10 straight. Ramaley price of \$1.25 a gallon on punch is met by the sale price \$1.25 a gallon by Mrs. Gardner, who will give us a fresh fruit

punch. Mr. Mundell moved that T.C.T.C. get 3 gallons of punch frappé from Mrs. Gardner for the Matinee dance. The motion was seconded by Mrs. Coram and was passed. . . . Mr. Bufkins reported that he was unable to report on measurements of the Hollow. . . .

From minutes for May 21, 1925:

. . . . [Pres.] Kyle reported for the Dance Committee that Stevens' Orchestra will give four piece orchestra for \$28. Cornelius Johnson made six posters for which T.C.T.C. owes him \$4.00. Posters have been placed in conspicuous locations.

It was arranged that Miss Vassar will serve punch. Mr. Mundell will sell tickets. Wm. Benjamin offered to work in cloak room if possible to attend dance. Kyle reported that he and Mr. Mundell had cleared ground for one court. Kyle, Bufkins and Benjamin agreed to put up court Sat. May 23 at 2:30. Mr. Bufkins reported it impossible to measure the Hollow as it was locked. Kyle reported that he and Mundell had not seen Mrs. England. . . .

From minutes for June 4, 1925:

. . . . The dance committee made the following report of expenditures & receipts:

Door Receipts	89.00	
Punch	15.10	
Checking	2.10	
Expenditures		
Hall	20.00	
Punch Bowl	.50	
Music	28.00	
Punch	3.75	
Ice	.10	
	<hr/>	
	52.35	
Bal.	53.85	On Deposit
Outstanding Bills		
Chester Oden	.50	
Cornelius	3.50	
	<hr/>	
	4.00	

Motion was passed to pay Mr. Krantz \$15.00. It was decided to carry account on Mr. Mundell's account. Johnson and Kyle agreed to put down one court.

Meeting adjourned

The Bulletin Appeal presented bill for \$10 for advertisement. It was decided to see Mr. Carter who authorized "ads" before acknowledging bill. . . .

From minutes for July 23, 1925:

. . . . The proposition suggested by Mr. E.A. Carter of joining the Mid-West Tennis Association was discussed. Mr. Mundell reported Mr. Krantz at (?) lake (?) son does not believe that father is going to do anything to grounds this year. T. Club discussed matter—decided not to throw away more money on Hollow this year. A motion was

passed to hold 1925 Tournament at University Courts. A motion to have a ladies tournament and award a cup for that was passed. . . .

From minutes for July 30, 1925:

. . . . Mr. Woodard to look into reserving of courts at Dunning Field for tournament. . . .

From minutes for Aug. 6, 1925:

. . . . Committee from Phyllis Wheatley Tennis Club asked to be allowed to join in with T.C.T.C. in tournament. Motion was passed that P.W.T.C. should be permitted to join & share both expenses and receipts. . . .

. . . . Attendance: 9 Visitors: 6

From minutes for Aug. 13, 1925:

. . . . It was decided that tournament date be set by committee which should brook no interference by unfinancial (?) tournament chairman. Secretary was instructed to get in touch with managers of Mid-West Association. Tournament committee reported that they had not been able to meet with Phyllis Wheatley Tennis Club. . . .

From minutes for Aug. 20, 1925:

. . . . Mr. Kyle reported that Mr. Woodard had met Phyllis Wheatley Tennis Club. They have decided that it would be unprofitable to go in with T.C.T.C. for tournament as competition would be too great. Offered to play our champions. . . .

From minutes for Sept. 3, 1925:

. . . . After discussion of advisability of affiliating with Western Tennis Association before further information on subject was received, the motion to affiliate with Western T.A. was passed. . . .

From minutes for Feb. 11, 1926:

. . . . Miss Muriel Alexander has been engaged to make four posters for [Feb. 22] dance which are to be placed in Alexander's Sweet Shop, Pruell's restaurant, and in Mpls at the Natl (?) Cafe and Phyllis Wheatley House. Advertisements are to be run in the "Coming Events" column of the St. Paul Echo for two issues. Motions to donate \$5.00 to Sweet Cafe fund of N.A.A.C.P. and sufficient money to help "Y" Sports Club purchase portable Victrola for "Y" were tabled for further discussion at next meeting. . . .

From minutes for Feb. 18, 1926:

. . . . The [annual] election of officers was opened by a motion made by Mr. E.A. Carter [that] the present administration be given a note of confidence and re-elected to serve for coming year. The motion was seconded and passed and a unanimous ballot re-elected present incumbents. . . . A committee was appointed to teach beginners—this committee to be at the call of the club. . . .

A short meeting of the "Y" Sports Club was held after Tennis Club meeting. Mrs. Chapman offered to donate Monola to club to in turn give to "Y". Some repairs necessary, but \$8.50 in treasury should easily cover repairs. . . .

From minutes for Apr. 15, 1926:

. . . . Motion was passed to notify members the annual membership fee of \$1.00 was due Apr. 1. . . Motion passed that no member shall be eligible for tournament whose fee is not paid by May 31. . . Letter from Western Tennis Association asking that other Minn. clubs be urged to join was given to Pres. to recommend the Phyllis Wheatley Club. Receipt of membership in N.A.A.C.P. read.

From minutes for Apr. 29, 1926:

. . . . The committee on teaching beginners asked that other members assist in teaching members. . . . It was suggested that later in the season we have hikes Sundays, ending at the courts, where we will then play tennis and go from there to the various churches. Motion was passed to purchase two dozen balls at \$4.80 a dozen from Otis Woodard. Balls are to be left at Mr. Mundell's and sold to members and the public at \$.50 apiece. A motion was passed to take out Urban League membership of \$1.00. A picnic was proposed for the spring. Motion was passed to hold party for former, present and prospective members at Pioneer Hall Sat eve. May 8. . . .

From minutes for July 15, 1926:

. . . . Invitations to the tournaments of the American Tennis Assn., New Jersey Tennis Assn. and New York State Assn. were read. . . . Motion passed to send delegate to St. Louis to compete in American Tennis Assn. Tournament, delegate to be chosen in later meeting. . . .

Aug. 1928 minutes:

The T.C.T.C. met at the home of the secy. A.M. Coram. The annual tournament was planned for the week of Aug. 20, and a reorganization meeting discussed for the first Fri. in Sept. Mr. Mundell was delegated to get a present for Mr. E.A. Carter, Urban League Secy., organizer of T.C.T.C., who is leaving for New York on Aug. 15.

From a note in T.C.T.C. secretary's notebook, dated 11/8/77, following the solitary minutes from 1928:

Apparently the Twin City Tennis Club held no more meetings. The 3 officers—Kyle, Mundell & Coram—gave several matinee dances. Proceeds went into the treasury. When I. Myrtle Carden came to St. Paul in 1929 she met with the above officers & asked for the money in the treasury to help with some of the expenses of the newly opened Hallie Q. Brown House. Her request was granted & the money given to Hallie Q. Brown House. Thus ended the Twin City Tennis Club.

At the end of the T.C.T.C. secretary's notebook, following quite a few blank pages, there are listings of members who have paid the annual dues. The last of these listings, apparently from 1928, consists of 107 members whose \$1.50 annual dues had been paid. With quite a few of the names, addresses have been added, the majority from the Rondo neighborhood, with several from other neighborhoods in St. Paul or Minneapolis.

The founder of the Twin City Tennis Club, Mr. E.A. Carter, who is prominently mentioned in the final, August 1928 club minutes, and I. Myrtle Carden, mentioned in the 11/8/77 note, were essential figures in founding Hallie Q. Brown House in 1929. In 1972 this institution, renamed Hallie Q. Brown Community Center, moved into St. Paul's newly-opened Martin Luther King Community Recreation Center, the site of the MLK Tennis Buffs' home courts. Below are

several paragraphs from the history of the Hallie Q. Brown Community Center, taken from its website, which give further information on E. A. Carter and I. Myrtle Carden.

Excerpt from the History of Hallie Q. Brown Community Center,
<http://www.hallieqbrown.org/site/index.php/about/>

It was during this decade [the 1920's] that the St. Paul Urban League was formed in an attempt to address the growing social problems facing African Americans in the capitol city. Under the direction of Executive Secretary Elmer A. Carter, the St. Paul Urban League provided dynamic leadership at a time when it was greatly needed. Carter initiated the first formal step in addressing the needs of St. Paul's black community by conducting a survey of possible facilities where critical programs and services could be implemented.

In January 1929, an advisory committee met to formulate new plans for a community center to be housed at the former Central Avenue Branch of the Y.W.C.A. On April 1, 1929, Miss I. Myrtle Carden, the center's first Executive Director, met with the Board of the St. Paul Urban League to discuss a name for the center. It was determined that the name for the new community center should be chosen through an essay contest in which essayists profiled the life of an outstanding leader. Herbert Howell, a student at Hamline University, won the contest with his essay about the African American educator, elocutionist, women's suffrage leader, and author, Hallie Quinn Brown. Thus, Hallie Q. Brown Community Center, Inc. was born.

Not long after it was established, Hallie Q. Brown Community Center, Inc., moved to the Masonic Hall at Aurora and Mackubin until it relocated in 1972 to our current home in the Martin Luther King Center at 270 North Kent Street. When the current facility was built, our primary service area doubled to include the entire Summit-University community.