



THE ALEXANDRIA ORAL HISTORY CENTER
OFFICE OF HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA
CITY OF ALEXANDRIA



Oral History Interview

with

Charlene Napper

Interviewer: *Francesco de Salvatore*

Narrator: *Charlene Napper*

Location of Interview:
406 North Alfred Street, Alexandria, VA 22314

Date of Interview: *02/15/2023*

Transcriber: *Jaclyn Maraldo*

Summary:

Charlene Napper reflects upon growing up at Cross Canal, the trailer courts, and the Montgomery Projects. She also reflects upon living and raising children in Alexandria during desegregation.

Notes:

Also present during the interview was Eric Napper.

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General	Childhood in the countryside; Segregation; Desegregation; Sit-in; swimming in the Potomac River; young motherhood; blindness; pets; games; school; eloping; NAACP; Girl Scouts; Boy Scouts; Super Bowl; church; giving birth; removal of a Confederate statue
People	Eric Napper; Nanny; Preston Allen; Megan Medley; Miss Airhouse; Nettie Gillum; Cousin Minnie; Cousin Lena; Charles L. Taylor; Dorothy Elizabeth Taylor; Uncle Joe; Uncle Oscar Taylor; Ma; Albert Knapper; Tom Lomax; Ella Lomax; James Z; Renae; Oscar Lomax; Peewee; Buster; Cissy Jackson; Donald Taylor; Charles Alvin Taylor; Aunt Rosie; Miss Casey; Miss Sealy Coles; Dr. Buzzard; the Harris family; Virginia

	<p>Hylton; Julia Pritchett; Alice Newman; Cousin Martha; Terrell family; Smith Miller; John Parker; Susie Gray; Wesley Elam; William Pitts; Edith Casey; Bernice Perry; Ferris Holland; Rubye Johnson; Coach Louis Johnson; Mabel Lee Smith; Reverend Andrew Warren Adkins; John Taylor; General Leo Brooks; Nellie Brooks Quander; Naomi Lewis, Earl Lloyd; Bubba Ellis; Buddie Ford; Sadie Napper; Louis Quander Napper; William Red Jackson; Charles Richard Napper; Leonard Lee Napper; the Williams; the Jarretts; John J. Ewald; Miss Luckett; Samuel Wilbert Tucker; William Evans; Edward Gaddis; Morris Murray; Clarence Strange; Otto L. Tucker; Ray Luckett; Judge Irene L. Pancoast; Aunt Katherine; Lee Fones; Coach Luckie Elliott; Bruce Johnson; The Drifters; the Five Keys; The Temptations; Duke Ellington; Deacon Charity; Thomas Chambliss Williams</p>
<p>Places</p>	<p>Alfred Street; Cross Canal; Trailer Courts; Madison Projects; Montgomery Street; Fairfax Street; garbage dump/tennis courts; First Street; Lyles-Crouch; Payne Street; Virginia Public Services; R.E. Knight and Sons Hardware; King Street; First Seventh Day Adventist; Johnson Swimming Pool; Department of Health, Education, and Welfare; Theodore Ficklin Elementary; Maryland; Casey Clinic; Alexandria Hospital; Washington Street; Henry Street; Braddock Road; Parker-Gray; Martha Miller's Kindergarten; Seminary; Patrick Street; Halowell School for Girls; Snowden School for Boys; Alfred Street Baptist Church; City Recreation Department; Manassas, VA; United Services Organization; Ramsay House; North Carolina A and T; Alexandria YMCA; Washington D.C.; Mt. Vernon [street]; Answering Alexandria; the Hump; Oronoco Street; Banner Laundry; Polly Prim; John J. Ewald Park; Goldie Ewald; Kate Waller Barrett Library; Queen Street; Hot Shoppe; Beck's ice cream; Hopkins House; Alexandria Recreation Department; Arlington; George Washington Middle School; Elks Lodge #48; Israel Temple; T.C. Williams High School; Alexandria City High School; George Mason Hotel</p>

Francesco De Salvatore [00:00:00] And you'll sit through that. Okay.

Charlene Napper [00:00:05] My name? Charlene Taylor Napper. I am 90 years old. I was born September 30th, 1932, and live at 406 North Alfred Street, right here in Alexandria, Virginia. [I've] Been in this house, it will be 75 years this coming May.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:00:35] Wow.

Charlene Napper [00:00:35] This is the only location I've ever known [laughing].

Francesco De Salvatore [00:00:41] What's the address?

Charlene Napper [00:00:43] 406 North Alfred.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:00:47] Great street, great. My name is Francesco, and I'm interviewing Miss Napper today. It's February 15th, 2023. So, yeah. So, Miss Napper, why don't we start from the beginning. Can you maybe share some of your earliest memories from childhood?

Charlene Napper [00:01:09] Well, from my childhood days, we lived what we call [A]Cross Canal, and that's where we were raised until I guess I was about 7 or 8, maybe a little bit older when we moved. We lived in the trailer courts when they moved us from [A]Cross Canal. We lived in the trailer courts and then we lived, I can't give dates or whatever, please forgive me for that.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:01:42] Oh yeah you're good.

Charlene Napper [00:01:43] But then we were the first black family to move into the projects on Madison Street. We lived at 1005 Madison Street, and that's where we grew up until I got married and moved out.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:02:03] That's great. So you've been all over the place. So let's start at Cross Canal, you know, so for myself, I've never seen Cross Canal. I'm just curious. Can you describe Cross Canal when you were growing up there?

Charlene Napper [00:02:21] Well, it was country. [A]Cross Canal was where the freed slaves, that's where they moved. And it's a plaque right there on Montgomery Street, Montgomery and Fairfax Street designating that area for what it is. And all I know is that was where we lived. And the men, they fished, they did a lot of fishing. And we had farmlands, we had cows, had horses we had pigs [laughing] Yes. And that was that. That was their life.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:03:14] Wow. What's it like thinking about that time for you?

Charlene Napper [00:03:20] Oh, when Eric [Napper] took me out there one day he took m--

Francesco De Salvatore [00:03:26] Who's Eric?

Charlene Napper [00:03:26] My son Eric took me for a ride. I did not realize I was [at] [A]Cross Canal. Nothing is there that I remember. Not one thing. And we lived at 429 First Street until we

moved, as I say, into the trailer courts because it was starting to develop then. And that [to her son Eric] what is that apartment named, Eric, out there where Nanny's mother's home was, and the doctor's office right across the street from it? I can't [re]call the name at that hotel. Right on [pauses trying to think of the name] I can't call a name of it now. I forgot.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:04:31] Crowne Plaza?

Charlene Napper [00:04:34] Right on the corner of Montgomery and Fairfax Street. A big hotel, right. It might be the name. I don't remember it. I don't remember. But then right in front of it, it's a doctor's offices is right there. And I had no idea that we were [at] [A]Cross Canal. I'll tell you 1 thing I do remember that I betcha a lot of people don't think of, you know, right on Montgomery Street, you know, where the tennis court is?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:05:05] Yeah.

Charlene Napper [00:05:05] That used to be the garbage dump. That was where they dumped all the garbage. Did you know that?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:05:14] No, I don't think I knew that.

Charlene Napper [00:05:16] Yes, that was where they used to--

Francesco De Salvatore [00:05:17] Montgomery and what?

Charlene Napper [00:05:19] Fairfax Street. Right there. Right where, I don't know if it's still there now, a tennis court was right there on Montgomery Street there and all that area where that tennis court is. They don't know they are playing on the city dump.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:05:40] Right.

Charlene Napper [00:05:40] That's where they dumped all the garbage and everything.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:05:44] Wow, wow.

Charlene Napper [00:05:45] And we used to see those big wharf rats. The rats would come up from the river, you know, and come up on to the dump and go back. We could sit on our porch and see them. And my grandfather, my father's father [laughing], used to take his B.B. gun and sit on the porch and shoot the rats [laughing].

Francesco De Salvatore [00:06:09] You wouldn't eat them, would you?

Charlene Napper [00:06:10] No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. That was actually his [way of] relaxing. He would sit right there and shoot the rats and my brothers used to have B.B. guns, and they used to play war. And they would play [in] what was nothing, but fields out there with no roads, and it was just like a regular country. Country. And they would play war and that was their relaxation because there was no football, no baseball, and that's all they knew. Mhm

Francesco De Salvatore [00:06:43] That's great. Yeah. So maybe, can you walk us through, uh, First Street?

Charlene Napper [00:06:50] Straight up and down?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:06:52] Yeah, just, like, what did it look like? What did it smell like? What were the sounds on First [Street], you know?

Charlene Napper [00:06:57] Well it was just, actually, it was just pure country. It was just dirt road, one lane. You go in and you come out and everybody had their own horse and they had their own wagons that they would use back and forth. And that was it. Well, that was when we were children.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:07:25] What did your home look like?

Charlene Napper [00:07:27] Oh, we had a nice home. We had a nice home. And we lived at 429 First Street. And then right on Fairfax and First Street the very first house there, that was Mr. Preston Allen's house. And he was the first to have steps to go up from the street up to his house. And he did his own steps. And then there was Miss Megan Medley, and there was Miss Airhouse and then Miss Nettie Gillum. That was our street. And going down Fairfax Street were the Gillums' homes and what we call going down road, them up on a hill was where my cousin Minnie and my cousin Lena [lived] and they worked in private homes. You know, the homes, and that's what they did. And that was it. It wasn't that many out there.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:08:48] What did your home look like?

Charlene Napper [00:08:50] It was a nice home. Yeah, we had outdoor toilets. No, you know, we didn't have no plumbing or anything like that. We kept it clean. We had to keep the house clean. My mother was an excellent cook. But my father he was [emphasized] a cook. And when we went to school, we went to Lyles-Crouch. We walked from [A]Cross Canal all the way out to Lyles-Crouch. And that was when we were in the first, second, third, grade, fourth. And then when we left Lyles-Crouch, we came up to Parker-Gray and that's where we finished with that education and at time we didn't go any further than the 11th grade. When you've finished 11th grade, you graduated.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:09:55] When did your parents moved to Cross Canal?

Charlene Napper [00:09:59] Hmm?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:09:59] When did your parents moved to Cross Canal?

Charlene Napper [00:10:02] My mother was born and raised out there. Uh huh. My father lived on Payne Street right here, what we called then Uptown. And he met my mother and started courting my mother. And he and my mother married. Then he moved and lived at Cross Canal, as have my father, my mother, and all lived at Cross Canal until I said they moved us to the trailer courts. Mm hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:10:37] What are your parents' names?

Charlene Napper [00:10:38] Charles L. Taylor. Dorothy Elizabeth Taylor. And my mother was Dorothy Elizabeth Napper.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:10:50] Got it. So maybe let's talk about your father. Can you describe your father a little bit more? What are some memories?

Charlene Napper [00:11:00] My father?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:11:01] Yeah.

Charlene Napper [00:11:01] Oh, my goodness. My father was a big man. He was big. And he worked for R.E.- no, first job he had, it was then the Virginia Public Services, which is now the, uh. What's the electric company here now? But it was then called the Virginia Public Service. That's what he worked for. And when he left there-

Francesco De Salvatore [00:11:26] The electric company.

Charlene Napper [00:11:27] Mm hmm. And when he left there, he worked for R.E. [Robert Ernest] Knight and Sons [Hardware], which was on King Street. You know, Mr. Knight, that was a head on the school, you know, school board. And, you know, like that. Mm hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:11:46] What are some of your fondest memories with your dad?

Charlene Napper [00:11:50] My father?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:11:51] Yeah what are some memories that stick out?

Charlene Napper [00:11:53] My father spoiled me. I was the only girl, you know, I had three brothers, and I was the only girl. And so [laughing] I did no wrong. My mother had to be the one that did the correcting for me. But my father would come and get my brothers and take them on the truck with him when he would take deliveries and all that. Yeah, my father was an excellent cook and he went to the store every day. Every day he'd go to store, buy something.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:12:30] Yeah. What were some of the things that he cooked? [repeats] What were some of the things that he cooked?

Charlene Napper [00:12:38] Oh, he could cook anything. My father? Yeah, my father. He could cook basic meals. Now, my mother, every Saturday, she would fix homemade hot rolls and she would make those rolls up at night, let em rise. She would get up and sometimes during the night, key them down, let em re-rise again. And then in the morning, Sunday morning, we always had hot rolls on Sunday morning. Never a [Sunday] morning [without them]. And I tell you another thing, though. We didn't know anything about store-bought bread. We didn't know you could buy bread in a store. All of our bread was corn bread or pancakes. Everything was made fresh. Nothing was bought from the store.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:13:39] Where did your dad learn to cook?

Charlene Napper [00:13:42] I guess, I got no idea.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:13:45] Was it from his parents?

Charlene Napper [00:13:45] I guess from his mother. I guess. I don't know.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:13:51] What do you know about your dad's family? About his parents and their history?

Charlene Napper [00:13:56] The only thing I know, I know my grandmother's side, my father's father, he never at one time mentioned his family. We did not know. We call him Papa. And a lot of people in Alexandria didn't realize that he was black. He was white, may as well say he was white, but he passed or whatever. But he never, ever, ever, ever discussed not one member of his family. We didn't know whether he had brothers or sisters. Maybe when he came up in this area. And my grandmother, her mother was white. I know that. Her father, he was called mulatto because he was mixed. I know that I didn't know that much about my grandmother's mother. Mm hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:15:02] And these are the Nappers, right?

Charlene Napper [00:15:05] Hmm?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:15:06] No, these aren't the Nappers. What was your dad's last name?

Charlene Napper [00:15:11] Taylor.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:15:11] Taylor. Sorry.

Charlene Napper [00:15:12] Yeah. My father was Taylor. My mother was a Knapper, K-N-A-P-P-E-R.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:15:19] Is there anything else you know about the Taylors? About, you know, about your dad's side?

Charlene Napper [00:15:29] Nothing. Not one thing about his side. Only one I know is my father's brothers and my aunts, his sisters and all. I know all of them. But as for my grandfather's people, absolutely nothing.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:15:49] Sounds like it was tough. He didn't want to talk about it too much?

Charlene Napper [00:15:53] He never talked about it at all. None at all.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:15:57] Why do you think he didn't talk about it?

Charlene Napper [00:15:59] I have no [idea]. We never asked. I guess it never bothered us. It's just as he was granddad, he was Papa, that was it.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:16:09] Do you have any memories with your grandparents? Any memories that stick out?

Charlene Napper [00:16:14] Oh, my goodness, yes! They lived on Payne Street. We would call that going Uptown. And Daddy would take us and we would go Uptown and spend the day with my grandmother and my grandfather at their house and with my aunties and all of them like that and my uncle. We would spend a day with them. Yeah, I knew them well. Mhmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:16:40] Are there any specific stories?

Charlene Napper [00:16:42] My grandmother, my father's mother, was an original of First Seventh Day Adventist, who formed the first Seventh Day Adventist Church here in Alexandria and I know that. Yes, I know that much. Yes. And my Uncle Joe, he went in the military and my Uncle Oscar, he was a great swimmer.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:17:25] Oscar Taylor?

Charlene Napper [00:17:26] Yes. Oscar Taylor. Uh huh. Did anyone ever mention to you about the Johnson Swimming Pool?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:17:34] Um, yeah.

Charlene Napper [00:17:35] That was the swimming pool for the blacks at that time. And uh-

Francesco De Salvatore [00:17:42] Can you just really quick, just for people listening, like, where is the Johnson Swimming Pool?

Charlene Napper [00:17:48] It was what we called it, but the Icehouse, it was the Icehouse. It was up there behind the Icehouse going up Henry Street. It was behind the Icehouse then. That was the Johnson Swimming Pool.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:18:01] And so he swam there?

Charlene Napper [00:18:02] He was a lifeguard there. He swam from this shore on this side of the Potomac River, all the way over to Maryland. He swam, yes.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:18:15] Wow. Like, every day or every week or?

Charlene Napper [00:18:17] No, not every day. That's the only way, like, well, when we grew up and was coming up at that time, they would swim in the [Potomac] River. That river was beautiful. And it was just like a beach at that time before they dredged it for that airport and for that bridge. And people used to come down there with their picnic baskets and come [at] [A]Cross Canal and sit down there on the river shore.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:18:47] Wow. Yeah, it's very different now.

Charlene Napper [00:18:50] Oh, yes. Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:18:52] Well, maybe let's talk a little about your mom. So what's your mom's name again?

Charlene Napper [00:18:57] Dorothy. Uh huh.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:18:59] And so, like, what do you know about her side of the family?

Charlene Napper [00:19:02] Oh, I know all my mother's family. I know every one of them. I know my grandmother, my great-grandmother. And I knew of my great-great-grandmother. I knew she was a slave here in Alexandria, and she was freed here in Alexandria. But the only name that I know of that they ever called her was Ma. I never knew her name. But I heard my mother call her Ma.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:19:32] That's your great-great-grandmother right?.

Charlene Napper [00:19:32] Great-great, mhm. Now my mother knew her.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:19:37] Okay.

Charlene Napper [00:19:37] My mother knew her.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:19:39] Did she ever tell you stories about her?

Charlene Napper [00:19:41] Only one thing my mother always said. Ma never allowed her mother to spank her, to put her hands on her. She could not whip her at all. If there was anything she did wrong, she could punish her by setting her down or whatever. But she could never, ever put her hands on her to whip her. Mm hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:20:08] Anything else about your mom's family?

Charlene Napper [00:20:10] Hmm?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:20:11] Anything else about about your mom's family, the Knappers?

Charlene Napper [00:20:18] Oh, [laughing] only one thing I know is why my mother's father left Alexandria. At the pool room, he got to fightin at the pool room, and he hit man in the head with either a pool ball or that stick. And he thought he killed a man and he ran home. And he told my grandmother, very defeated, "I got to leave." He said, "I'm not going to jail." He left, went to Baltimore, and never came back. And at that time, they didn't go looking for you, no way. So he never, ever came back to Alexandria. Mm hmm. And his name was Albert Napper.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:20:59] Albert Napper. Tell me a little bit about your mom. Can you describe her?

Charlene Napper [00:21:06] Oh, my mother was a gentle lady. My mother, never as far as I can remember, my mother never raised her voice at us. My father did all that. It was enough for him anyway [laughing]. But no, my mother was very gentle. I never, ever, ever heard my mother say a

curse word. And she didn't allow us, but we'd get under undercover, you know? But she never allowed that. Mm hmm. But she was an excellent cook and housekeeper. Oh, yes.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:21:43] What were some of the favorite meals that she made?

Charlene Napper [00:21:46] Oh, my goodness. My mother could fry up some chicken, and so could my father. Well, I can say both of them were excellent, excellent cooks. That's all I can say.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:21:58] Yeah. That's great. Do you have any other favorite memories with your mom growing up? Anything that sticks out for you? Any memories being with her?

Charlene Napper [00:22:05] No. I just remember when she worked, my mother worked for HEW, which was then [the Department of] Health, Education and Welfare. Mm hmm. She worked for them. And she became a, what you call it? As you go up?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:22:26] She got promoted or?

Charlene Napper [00:22:26] Promoted! Yeah uh huh uh huh.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:22:29] What did she do for them?

Charlene Napper [00:22:31] I don't know. I know she worked for them. She was a government worker, yeah. Mm hm. Yeah. And my father in the evening, he would get us and take us over and get her and bring her home. That was every evening. We'd ride with him to go pick her up from work. Mm hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:22:56] Wow.

Charlene Napper [00:22:57] And she retired from HEW [Health, Education and Welfare].

Francesco De Salvatore [00:23:03] I kind of want to back to Cross Canal because you were telling me before we were recording a story about someone who was a rower.

Charlene Napper [00:23:14] Oh Mr. Tom Lomax?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:23:17] Yeah. Can you share that story again?

Charlene Napper [00:23:18] Yes. [laughing] It was a big family of Lomaxes out there. Oh, and his sister, Miss Ella, who was in the boat with us, she took her grandson and granddaughter and they integrated the [Theodore] Ficklin Elementary School out there. That was who integrated the Ficklin Elementary School. Miss Ella Lomax took James Z and and Renae. They were the first blacks to go into the Ficklin School out there at Cross Canal. And Mr. Tom would come in early in the morning and get my grandmother and the four or five different ladies and put them in his rowboat and row them from this side all the way over to the Maryland side where they would work on the farmlands. But what they did out there to get there, I have no idea. But then at a certain time before it, I guess they knew whatever time it was looking like, he would come and get them and bring them back, and [laughing] one evening when they were coming back, Miss Ella told Mr. Tom, [she] says, "A big

boat getting ready [to] come down that river." "I see it," that's all he said, and he kept rowing, kept rowing and Miss Ella, said again, said, "Tom, come on now, you better row a little bit faster. That boat is gaining on us." [She] said Mr. Tom didn't say nothing else. He kept rowing. He rowed real slow, just real slow. My grandma would say the last time Miss Ella, his sister said, "Tom, look, that boat is going on us. Now you better get us out of here." He told her, "God damn it, if I ain't rowing fast enough, get out and walk!" Now that was in the middle of the Potomac River! But he got em back safe on the other side [laughing]. Yes. So I think that was their last experience going over on that side. I'm not sure. But that's what they were telling us about. [They] said Mr. Tom, that Lomax family. One of his brothers. Mr. what was Mr. Tom's brother's name? Oscar. Oscar Lomax. He stole his mother's Bible while trying to sell the Bible so he could get some liquor [laughing].

Francesco De Salvatore [00:26:02] That's not good.

Charlene Napper [00:26:06] Yes [laughing].

Francesco De Salvatore [00:26:07] That's great. No, I love that story. Do you have any other stories with neighbors?

Charlene Napper [00:26:12] Yeah, we had good neighbors. Yeah, it wasn't that many girls out there, though. It was just about all boys. And, oh, there was Peewee, Buster, Cissy Jackson, and it was about eight or nine, maybe eight or nine boys and maybe one or two girls that I can remember and it's been so long.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:26:46] Yeah, it's been a long time. That's great. Really quick, what were your brothers' names?

Charlene Napper [00:26:53] My brother?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:26:54] Yeah.

[00:26:54] Donald Taylor. Alvin, well, his name is Charles Alvin, but we called him Alvin so much I forget his name is Charles. Charles Alvin Taylor. And John Leonard Taylor.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:27:08] Right. One thing we haven't talked about, and it's okay if you don't want to talk about it, but because through your childhood you ended up losing your sight, right?

Charlene Napper [00:27:21] I was born blind.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:27:23] You were born blind, right.

Charlene Napper [00:27:23] I was born blind. Yes.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:27:27] Yeah, would you want to talk about that a little bit?

Charlene Napper [00:27:28] Oh, I don't mind. Yeah, my brother Donald, he and I are so close in age. He would take me. He would lead me. And he was my eyes. They say he did everything for me

and I imagine that's why my brother Donald and I are extremely close now. And he was my protector, he was my everything. And I do remember when my eyesight came back to me, it was a parade of something that was coming up King Street at that time. And I don't remember whether it was a horse or what, because I didn't know what it was. But I could see and I'd never seen my mother. I'd never seen my father. I didn't even know what my hands looked like. And it just-

Francesco De Salvatore [00:28:26] How old were you when this happened?

Charlene Napper [00:28:28] 4.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:28:30] You were 4?

Charlene Napper [00:28:31] I was 4 years old when my eyesight, uh huh, came back to me. And, uh, at the Casey Clinic, you know, where Casey Clinic is, that's out there it's behind the Alexandria Hospital. It may not be there now, but it was behind the Alexandria Hospital. At that time it was down on Royal Street. It was a clinic on Royal Street. And, you know, we couldn't go there. But Miss Casey knew my Aunt Rosie, and they were real close. They were close friends. And Miss Casey would take me back and forth to the clinic. They'd say the doctors down there would put drops of something in my eyes. And when my eyesight came back to me, my Aunt Rosie got in touch with Miss Casey, and they say she got me and they say I'm written up now at that clinic. And that's what they're telling me.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:29:30] Yeah. Did your mom go to someone on Payne Street?

Charlene Napper [00:29:42] Hmm?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:29:43] He [Donald] mentioned that maybe your mom went to someone on Payne Street to help with your vision.

Charlene Napper [00:29:50] Oh, Miss Sealy (sp?) Coles.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:29:52] That's her name?

Charlene Napper [00:29:53] Miss Sealy Coles, yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:29:55] Yeah.

Charlene Napper [00:29:55] She was a, what you call, a witch lady. Whatever.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:30:00] Right, yeah.

Charlene Napper [00:30:00] And she used to have my brother Donald and my cousin go over in the graveyard [laughing] and get dirt from the graveyard. That's what they say now! And every morning, [emphasizes] every morning, they say Miss Sealy would come to my house and bathe my eyes with my own pee before I even peed and they say that's what cleared my eyes.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:30:35] That's what cleared your eyes.

Charlene Napper [00:30:36] And people would come from everywhere and she would put hex on people and-

Francesco De Salvatore [00:30:42] Right. Yeah.

Charlene Napper [00:30:43] Miss Sealy with something else.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:30:45] Yeah. What else do you know about her? Cause I talk to other people, but some people, they don't know a lot about her.

Charlene Napper [00:30:53] Oh, honey-

Francesco De Salvatore [00:30:56] Like, who was she?

Charlene Napper [00:30:56] She lived, uh, three doors, two doors from my aunt. My Aunt Nanny married. And they all lived on Payne Street, right across the street from each other. And Miss Sealy lived right next door to my aunt and her husband. Her family and my father and all of them, they were close friends. They were close. But yeah. But she never bothered us, no. But people would come everywhere. They'd say all hours of the night, different times for Miss Sealy to give them some kind of potion or something for whatever they needed. Mhm.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:31:44] Huh. Do you know what she would make? Do you know, like, what she would make? Like, what kind of potions?

Charlene Napper [00:31:54] They said any kind! She could put something on to, like, a husband or wife getting him prominent potions, love potions. Or to make an enemy or whatever. That's what they were saying. Mm hhm. And then there was Doctor Buzzard [Ernest Bratton?], did he tell you about Doctor Buzzard?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:32:17] No. Who was that?

Charlene Napper [00:32:18] He was a big, big, big, uh, what you call him? Just like Miss Sealy, but he was bigger than Miss Sealy.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:32:35] He was into that type of work?

Charlene Napper [00:32:36] During that time, yes Dr. Buzzard.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:32:40] Okay. Can you say more about him?

Charlene Napper [00:32:42] Oh, I knew Dr. Buzzard well, yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:32:44] Yeah.

Charlene Napper [00:32:45] Yes, indeed, I knew him. He never bothered us. But we were friends. But they were people coming, oh my goodness, [to see] Dr. Buzzard. But he had his own office as he said [laughing].

Francesco De Salvatore [00:32:56] Where was his office?

Charlene Napper [00:32:57] Right at there at the, uh, oh what is it? Oh. At those apartments right across from the bridge, right there. He lived there and he was one of the first blacks to live in that building. In that apartment right there on Washington Street or going right there to the bridge. I don't know the name of those apartments. But yeah, he had his own office and they would come in it, people would come. Dr. Buzzard was something else. He said, if he can't do it, it can't be done.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:33:33] Can't be done. And so he was also like a herbal healer?

Charlene Napper [00:33:39] Mhm. That's what they call it. Yeah. I never knew his name but we only knew him as Dr. Buzzard.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:33:44] Wow. Okay. That's great. That's great. All right. So you were in Cross Canal until you were nine, right? Your family left Cross Canal when you were nine?

Charlene Napper [00:34:05] Uh huh.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:34:06] Why did you guys leave?

Charlene Napper [00:34:07] Well, they was building up and the house was sold.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:34:10] It got sold?

Charlene Napper [00:34:11] Yeah. And that's when-

Francesco De Salvatore [00:34:13] So you guys owned the house?.

Charlene Napper [00:34:17] No, they were renting. They were renting.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:34:19] Who did they rent from?

Charlene Napper [00:34:21] The Harrises up on Henry Street. All I know-

Francesco De Salvatore [00:34:24] The Harrises?

Charlene Napper [00:34:24] The Harrises on Henry Street. It was a black family, too.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:34:28] Right. Do you know anything about the, uh, about the Harrises?

Charlene Napper [00:34:33] Yeah. That was a, uh, Tyrese, well you don't know him. Anyway, yeah Deacon Harris belonged with the Third Baptist Church. That was his family. And we were all close friends and our families friends. We knew-

Francesco De Salvatore [00:34:50] And so they owned the land at Cross Canal?

Charlene Napper [00:34:53] Mm hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:34:53] Did they own all of it?

Charlene Napper [00:34:54] No, I knew they owned a house. And I imagine the land that it was [on]. I don't know that much, but I know they owned the house. And my mother used to rent to Deacon Harris up on in the street.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:35:07] Huh.

Charlene Napper [00:35:08] And when he sold the house, that's when they put us in the trailer camps, because there wasn't a place for us to go.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:35:17] So why did he sell the house?

Charlene Napper [00:35:18] I have no idea. I imagine because they were building up and the money looked good. I have no idea.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:35:26] You don't remember? Yeah.

Charlene Napper [00:35:26] Mm mm.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:35:28] Okay. So you move to first the trailers, right? So where were the trailers?

Charlene Napper [00:35:34] Down there under the bridge down there. Like you going up King Street. It was right down there. Right down there where the uh-

Francesco De Salvatore [00:35:44] Near Braddock Road?

Charlene Napper [00:35:46] Braddock Road. Uh huh. Mm hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:35:48] Okay.

Charlene Napper [00:35:49] Names get away from me, I'm sorry.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:35:52] Yeah you're ok, you're good. Um, you're remembering a lot [both laugh]! I hope you know that.

Charlene Napper [00:35:59] Okay.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:36:00] So you guys moved to the trailers over there. So what are some of your memories of it?

Charlene Napper [00:36:07] We had a dog named Teddy. He was a big dog. And Teddy used to come right there at the trailer courts. In fact, you weren't supposed to have any animals but everybody knew Teddy. Everybody at that time was just blacks in the trailer court anyway. And, uh, Teddy would come and stay right there at the steps right there with us. And he would go back and forth because he was from Cross Canal with us, but he would always go back [to] [A]Cross Canal because I guess that's where he was more familiar with. And then he would come back. And that's when they started first having cars coming up and down Washington Street and Teddy was coming across Washington Street and a car struck him. And you would have thought Teddy was a human. We had a funeral for Teddy.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:37:08] Did you?

Charlene Napper [00:37:09] Yes, indeed. And everybody in the trailer court was at the funeral. And they buried Teddy at Cross Canal. Took him back at Cross Canal. And the men dug, I guess, a big hole however they did it and put Teddy in that grave. Yeah, they had a funeral for Teddy [laughing].

Francesco De Salvatore [00:37:34] Did you like Teddy?

Charlene Napper [00:37:35] Loved Teddy! Yes, sir. Loved Teddy. Yes, indeed. Daddy would come bring Teddy in the house, that's when we lived on Madison Street definitely. And bring Teddy in the house. And Teddy would wake up in the middle of the night: "Woof woof." Had to go out. Daddy said, "Everybody love Teddy until it's time to get up and put him [outside]," cussing. Daddy get up and put Teddy out [laughing]. But yeah, we loved Teddy.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:38:07] So did everyone who was living in the trailers, were they from Cross Canal?

Charlene Napper [00:38:12] No, they were from different parts of the city.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:38:15] Right. Okay. Can you describe what it looked like? Like, what did the trailers look like?

Charlene Napper [00:38:22] They looked like houses, but they were flat.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:38:28] Okay.

Charlene Napper [00:38:29] And they had a little step. You could walk up into it. There weren't no pillars and nothing like that. It looked just like houses.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:38:36] And, like, it's like your trailer, like, how many bedrooms was it?

Charlene Napper [00:38:41] Well, there was my mother and my father, my brother, well, they slept together. And I was by myself and I had a kitchen and a toilet, a bath and everything. And and oh, at

the trailer court, there was one huge big trailer with running water, not [a] bathtub, a shower and toilet seats where you could go in there. For men on one side, divided women on the other side, but with the same-

Francesco De Salvatore [00:39:16] Right, interesting. Interesting. So how long were you at the trailers?

Charlene Napper [00:39:21] Oh, we were there until I started going to Parker-Gray. I was about 5 or 6 when we started going to Parker-Gray.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:39:36] You were 5 or 6 at Parker?

Charlene Napper [00:39:37] Uh huh. Uh huh. Uh huh.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:39:40] I thought you went to Lyles-Crouch

Charlene Napper [00:39:42] We went to Lyles-Crouch first, mm hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:39:44] Right.

Charlene Napper [00:39:44] And Miss Virginia Hylton was the first black principal of Lyles-Crouch and Cousin, uh, what was her name? Hmm. Moore. Can't [re]call her first name there. Anyway, she was one of the teachers at Parker, who was one of my family cousins.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:40:12] Okay.

Charlene Napper [00:40:13] At Lyles-Crouch.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:40:14] Now that you mention Lyles-Crouch, like, can you tell us more about Lyles-Crouch? What are your memories from Lyles-Crouch?

Charlene Napper [00:40:21] Oh Lyles-Crouch was wonderful. That was right on the train tracks, you know, right where it is now. It's still the same Lyles-Crouch. The train used to come up from the docks and come right up. And when we knew when the train was coming up, they couldn't let us out of school because we had to wait for the train to finish going up Duke Street. And I think then they stopped the train from running up and down.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:40:57] Yeah. You mentioned a teacher, but were there any other teachers from Lyles-Crouch that you remember?

Charlene Napper [00:41:07] Uh, let's see. No names, I can see the faces. Mm mm mm mm. Forgive me.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:41:18] You're okay. Don't worry.

Charlene Napper [00:41:21] I can see their faces, but the names. I just can't get the names.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:41:26] Yeah?

Charlene Napper [00:41:26] Miss Julia Pritchett was one!

Francesco De Salvatore [00:41:28] Miss Julia Pritchett? Ok.

Charlene Napper [00:41:29] Yeah. And then she taught also up at Parker-Gray.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:41:32] Okay.

Charlene Napper [00:41:33] Miss Julia Pritchett. Uh huh.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:41:35] Do you have any memories with her?

Charlene Napper [00:41:37] Of Miss Julia? My goodness yes. Miss Julia would spank you just like if she was your own mother. Yep and see, at that time, they all everybody knew each other. And that's like when my brother Alvin started to school, now, uh, Alice Newman, do you know the Newman family?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:41:59] A little bit, yeah.

Charlene Napper [00:42:00] Okay, well, Alice Newman was a teacher, and she taught the first grade. And in anyway, Alvin, we never, ever, ever called him Charles. It was always Alvin. And so she would call on Charles. She said, "Alvin, be looking around, looking for Charles." And she got Alvin and brought him out up [to] Cross Canal and said, "Dorothy, don't think I'm being funny, but does Charles know his name?" Mama say, "Yes, he know his name. Why?" She said, "Well, when I call on him, he looks around him like he's looking for a Charles." Mama said, "Well Alice, what do you call him?" She said, "We call him Charles." She [Mama] said, "I tell you what, he doesn't even know his name is Charles. He has been called Alvin ever since he's been born. We've never called him Charles. His name is Charles Alvin." And from that moment on, started calling him Alvin. He was one of the smartest in the class. Did they ever tell you about Cousin Martha Miller's, uh, kindergarten?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:43:18] No.

Charlene Napper [00:43:18] She was the first black kindergarten teacher in Alexandria for black children.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:43:25] Was that Lyles-Crouch?

Charlene Napper [00:43:27] No! Right there on Oronoco Street. Martha Miller. Yes, sir.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:43:31] What was it called?

Charlene Napper [00:43:32] Well, it was called Martha Miller's Kindergarten.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:43:35] And is that where you went?

Charlene Napper [00:43:37] Yes, we all went there. And why we called her Cousin Martha, we don't know. But everybody called her Cousin Martha.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:43:47] You have any memories? It was a long time ago.

Charlene Napper [00:43:48] Oh, my goodness. Every child that at my age, my brothers, went to Cousin Martha before they went to school. Yes.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:43:59] I didn't know that. That's great

Charlene Napper [00:44:01] Yes, sir. Martha Miller, mm hmm. Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:44:04] Great. Do you have any other memories from, going back to the trailer now, do you have any other memories from living at the trailer? Like, or actually, but before you answer that, I have a question like, why did your parents decide to move to the trailer?

Charlene Napper [00:44:18] They didn't decide! That was the only place they could go.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:44:21] Only place you could go. So can you say more about that? Why was it the only place?

Charlene Napper [00:44:28] Well, I imagine the city placed them there because there was no, where else could we go? We couldn't move [to] any part of the city. We couldn't go anywhere. That's the only way I know. We just went from [A]Cross Canal to the trailer courts.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:44:47] What did it feel like? I mean, it's curious, like, you know, I know you were young, but do you remember what it was like for your family to, you know, leave Cross Canal and then move to a trailer?

Charlene Napper [00:45:00] Yeah, it was it was a big shock. Because when we moved from [A]Cross Canal, what we called into the city then, we were moving into the city. What could we do? We didn't know anybody. We didn't know what to do. We didn't know where to go. We were just lost until we started actually going to school and meeting other children and all like that and going different places, walking back and forth with them. And we knew more about seminary than we knew right about in Alexandria, because we would walk up King Street go into Seminary because we had friends that lived in Seminary.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:45:51] Who were your friends?

Charlene Napper [00:45:52] The Terrells, the, uh, the Caseys and all of them. They lived in Seminary, and we all grew up together.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:46:03] And so would you go there when you were living in Cross Canal too?

Charlene Napper [00:46:08] No. Only when we left.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:46:09] When you left with the trailer? Yeah.

Charlene Napper [00:46:10] Mm hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:46:11] Okay. Okay. So walk me through, so then how did you end up at the Madison Projects?

Charlene Napper [00:46:22] When they built the projects right there where they are, right, they still there I'm sure. And they were getting ready to, I don't know what they were going to do down at that part on Braddock Road, but they were getting ready to get rid of the trailers. And we were the first black family to move into the projects right there on Madison Street. Right on the corner was Mr. Smith Miller and the house right next to Mr. Miller was Miss Megan Medley. And then me, my family. It was all three of us. We were the first to move into that.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:47:07] So it was on Madison Street right?

Charlene Napper [00:47:09] Madison Street, we lived [at] 1005 Madison Street.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:47:13] Madison and Patrick.

Charlene Napper [00:47:15] Mm hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:47:15] Yeah.

Charlene Napper [00:47:16] Mm hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:47:17] Okay. Um, yeah. So can you describe what it looked like? What did the Madison Projects look like?

Charlene Napper [00:47:28] Like it looks right now, they haven't changed.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:47:30] What does it look like?

Charlene Napper [00:47:32] Have you been up on Madison Street?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:47:35] I have, yeah.

Charlene Napper [00:47:35] Well, you see those projects?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:47:37] Right.

Charlene Napper [00:47:37] That's where we lived right there. Nothing has changed. They're still the same.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:47:43] Yeah? What are some of your memories from-

Charlene Napper [00:47:46] Oh, we had good memories because just about everybody we knew moved into projects at the same time, too. Yes.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:47:52] And what was it? Everyone from the trailers?

Charlene Napper [00:47:56] Mm hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:47:56] Yeah. So, yeah, maybe share, like, what were some of the memories that you have from living at the Madison Projects?

Charlene Napper [00:48:04] Well, we all played together and we went to school together. We would walk across the street, you know. Yeah, we would walk across the street, go to Parker-Gray.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:48:22] Right.

Charlene Napper [00:48:23] Cuz Parker-Gray was right across the street at that time. The boys would jump the fence and we would just walk around and come into the building.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:48:32] Wow.

Charlene Napper [00:48:33] It was family. Everybody knew each other, that's the only thing I can say.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:48:40] Did you guys do, like, where you guys share meals? How did you guys live together?

Charlene Napper [00:48:44] No. Uh uh. I mean, you could go to different ones if they were eating you could sit down cuz we all knew each other. That's the way it was. It was like a big family.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:48:58] Yeah. What did your home at the Madison Projects look like? Can you describe it for us?

Charlene Napper [00:49:03] Yeah, I had my own bedroom upstairs, my mother's bedroom, and we had three bedrooms upstairs, and my brothers had their own bedroom, and we came downstairs, was a living room and then the kitchen. And we all ate right in the kitchen.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:49:24] Wow. Do you have any favorite memories from living there in that house?

Charlene Napper [00:49:29] No just that I know we was there and that's the only home we knew. And it was, oh, running water. That was the first time we had a toilet.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:49:39] Wow.

Charlene Napper [00:49:40] That we didn't have to go [laughs] down in the back yard. Mm hmm. Did Don tell you about my chicken, Betty?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:49:50] I don't think so.

Charlene Napper [00:49:51] When we were living [at] [A]Cross Canal?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:49:53] No, I don't think so.

Charlene Napper [00:49:55] Next time you talk to Don ask him about Betty.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:49:57] Who was Betty?

Charlene Napper [00:49:58] I had a chicken. She was hatched in my hand from the egg. And when she saw me, I guess that was [like] her mother. Betty followed me just like a dog. Everywhere I went, Betty went. Betty was right beside me, everywhere. Now she would go out with the others. But all I'd have to do is come out [and say], "Alright, Betty, come!" Betty would come there right to me. Yes, indeed, hon. If I'd go, our toilets, as we say, was out in the yard, I'd go down to the toilet. Betty would sit right there at that toilet for me to come out, come right on up with me. Yes, I got my chicken. That was mine. Next time you talk to Don, ask Don about Betty. Ask him what happened to Betty. Don threw Betty down the well.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:50:55] He threw it down a well? [both laughing]

Charlene Napper [00:50:57] Don threw my Betty down the well! Daddy got a bucket and got Betty up out the well [laughs]. Daddy wore Donald out. He wasn't mean. I mean, I guess it's something he thought he wanted to do. Threw Betty down the well.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:51:12] Wow.

Charlene Napper [00:51:15] [laughs] Yeah my chicken Betty, yes indeed. And at that time everybody had chickens, you know, they would kill chicken. We never went to the store, but no one ever, ever touch Betty.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:51:29] What did Betty look like?

Charlene Napper [00:51:31] She was a regular hen. She was a brown.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:51:34] She was brown?

Charlene Napper [00:51:35] Brown hen mm hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:51:36] That's a cool story.

Charlene Napper [00:51:37] Just a regular chicken. Uh huh.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:51:40] So were there any, like, annual events that happened at the Madison Projects? Like were there any community-

Charlene Napper [00:51:56] Meetings and gatherings.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:51:57] Community events that happened? No? Based on your memories-

Charlene Napper [00:51:59] No.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:52:01] It was very separate.

Charlene Napper [00:52:02] No, we all knew each other.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:52:05] You all knew each other, yeah.

Charlene Napper [00:52:05] Yeah, but no, just like up and down the street now you know each other. And that was it.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:52:09] Would you guys play in the courtyard or like, in the-

Charlene Napper [00:52:13] Oh, yeah, we could play in a courtyard. Yeah. And up on Henry Street side and back on Patrick Street side was all open court. We could play in that. Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:52:25] What would you do?

Charlene Napper [00:52:27] Well, the boys used to play softball and the girls, we played on the sidewalk. We would play hopscotch, double Dutch and like that, that was all we could do. And oh, and the boys shot marbles. Yeah, they shot marbles. They had the big [marbles]. In fact, I don't know what I did, but I got em somewhere. I got one of the marbles that my brother Alvin had when he was a little boy. I still got that marble. It's called cateye, got a little eye in the marble.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:53:06] And it's a marble that he would play with?

Charlene Napper [00:53:09] Yeah, you couldn't touch his marble. No, that was his marble. Mm mm. That was his marble.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:53:19] How did your parents decorate the house? Do you remember? What color were the walls?

Charlene Napper [00:53:26] No, I don't remember that. Inside, no, you couldn't do any paint unless they gave it to you.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:53:32] What was the color of the wall?

Charlene Napper [00:53:34] I imagine it was white. I don't know. Maybe this color? I have no idea. No, I don't remember.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:53:42] Um. Do you have any other memories of neighbors there at the Madison Project?

Charlene Napper [00:53:49] Oh, all of them, Yes, indeed. Yes, indeed, yes. Right on the Patrick Street side. There was a, mm [trying to remember]. My goodness gracious. You know, I see all the faces. Mm. I wish I could [re]call the names, but I can't.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:54:18] You're ok, yeah, you're fine.

Charlene Napper [00:54:19] Yes.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:54:20] All right. So you were going to Parker-Gray, right, during this time? So yeah, maybe tell us a little bit more. Like what were some of your memories at Parker-Gray?

Charlene Napper [00:54:31] Oh, my goodness. We had good memories at Parker-Gray. Yes, indeed. We would go to school. And when you went in school, you lined up. You marched in school. You stood at your desk. You said the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag. And then you sit down and then you had to put your hands on your desk and the teachers would look at your fingernails. And if the boy's hair hadn't been combed, they would brush and comb the hair right there in the classroom. The teachers would do that. And, but like I say, the teachers were more like family because they all knew each other. And Parker-Gray, I told you that was named after my grandmother's brother.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:55:38] Yeah, can you re-tell that story?

Charlene Napper [00:55:42] Mm hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:55:43] About that? Yeah.

Charlene Napper [00:55:45] Yeah, Parker-Gray was named after my great-uncle. His name was John Parker. And Miss Susie Gray was a principal for the girl's school, Hallowell School for Girls. And Parker-Gray was named after John Parker, which was the, what's that school there?

Eric Napper [00:56:05] Snowden.

Charlene Napper [00:56:07] Snowden School for Boys. And that happened to be Parker-Gray named after those two because that's when they built Parker-Gray. And those schools was right across here, right in front of us right there.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:56:24] On Alfred Street.

Charlene Napper [00:56:26] Right in front of us. Mm hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:56:29] That's great. Do you remember any teachers, principals from Parker-Gray?

Charlene Napper [00:56:34] Yes. Mr. [Wesley] Elam was the first principal of Parker-Gray. And then Mr. [William] Pitts was the principal for us. And that was it. And I knew all the teachers. Yes, indeed. I knew all the teachers. Yes.

Charlene Napper [00:56:55] Who were some of your favorite teachers?

Charlene Napper [00:56:57] Oh, I told you, Miss oh, she came from the Lyles-Crouch.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:57:08] It's okay if you don't remember her name.

Charlene Napper [00:57:10] Miss [Edith] Casey was one.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:57:12] Miss Casey was one? Ok.

Charlene Napper [00:57:13] Yeah, Miss [Bernice] Perry was one.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:57:16] Why were they your favorite?

Charlene Napper [00:57:20] Well, favorite. That's all we had!

Francesco De Salvatore [00:57:22] That's all you had [laughs]! There were no choices.

Charlene Napper [00:57:23] And a Mr., who was a teacher, taught science. Mr. [Ferris] Holland. He was a science teacher at that time at the school and a Coach Johnson. Louis Johnson. He was the boys' coach for basketball, football, and baseball. And his wife, Miss [Ruby] Johnson, was the girls', uh, what you call it?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:58:08] The girls' coach?

Charlene Napper [00:58:11] She taught the girls like Coach Johnson taught the boys.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:58:23] P.E. ?

Charlene Napper [00:58:25] P.E.! Physical Ed[ucation]. Yeah. Uh huh. Uh huh. And her sister, her sister, Miss [Mabel Lee] Smith, taught math and Reverend [A.W. (Andrew Warren)] Adkins taught math. He was the first pastor of the Alfred Street Baptist Church out here. Reverend Adkins. And he taught math.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:58:49] What kind of student were you like?

Charlene Napper [00:58:52] Was I like?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:58:53] Yeah.

Charlene Napper [00:58:55] I guess every day I did everything. I loved history. I loved English. I loved science. I hated math. And to this day I hate math. But I can do it. But math, uh uh. And at that time, you had to go to stand at the blackboard. We had chalk at that time chalkboard. And you had to do the figuring on a board. And I hated that. I hated that. But now my brother, Alvin. He was a math, and still is, a math wizard.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:59:35] Wow.

Charlene Napper [00:59:37] Mm hmm. And my brother Donald. And John. They were I guess average, just like I was. Average.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:59:48] That's great. Is there anything else you want to say about your schooling, about Parker-Gray or that we haven't talked about?

Charlene Napper [00:59:56] Hmm?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:59:57] Is there anything else you want to say about Parker-Gray that I haven't asked you about or?

Charlene Napper [01:00:02] The only thing, I tell you what. Uh, Parker-Gray the group that we were with brought some wonderful leaders for the blacks. There's Leo Brooks, General Leo Brooks.

Charlene Napper [01:00:22] You went to school with him?

Charlene Napper [01:00:23] Yes. He and I sat side by side. And his sister, Nellie Brooks Quander. That was his sister. And we were in school together. And Naomi Lewis, Leo's wife, we were all in school together. And Earl Lloyd, he was the first black to play professional basketball. He was at Parker-Gray with all of us. We were all together. Bubba Ellis. He was great swimmer. And, uh, [Jerome] Buddie Ford he was with the Recreation Department. He was the first black with the City Recreation Department. Buddie Ford. Yes. We had a -

Francesco De Salvatore [01:01:17] A lot of people.

Charlene Napper [01:01:17] Yes, mm hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:01:19] A lot of people who did great things. Yeah.

Charlene Napper [01:01:21] Mm hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:01:22] That's great. That's great. So during this time, I forget and maybe I'm misremembering, but did you meet your your soon-to-be husband at this point?

Charlene Napper [01:01:34] Yeah, we were all in school together. He transferred, because at that time when they went to school, he was in Gold Springs (?). They went to school in Manassas. And then, I don't know. And his sister, I mean, not his sister. Yeah, his sister Sadie [Napper] moved right there in Alexandria, and she lived in those, uh, I don't know what you call em. It's a name for em now but we didn't have no name then. Right across there was the USO [United Services Organization]. And she lived right there and he moved with-

Francesco De Salvatore [01:02:08] Ramsay House?

Charlene Napper [01:02:08] Is that what they call the Ramsay House? Yeah, right there uh huh. And she lived, right there on Patrick Street, right there the very first one. And he moved in with his sister. And then that's how he came to Parker-Gray

Francesco De Salvatore [01:02:22] So you met him in high school right? What's his name?

Charlene Napper [01:02:27] Louis. Louis Quander Napper.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:02:32] Uh huh. Great.

Charlene Napper [01:02:33] Mm hmm yeah. Oh, and uh-

Francesco De Salvatore [01:02:35] Can you tell us when you first met him? What was your first memory with him?

Charlene Napper [01:02:39] Well, you just saw each other. That was all. We saw each other. And, uh, you remember William Red Jackson? He was the head football coach at [North Carolina] A and T [Agricultural and Technical State University]. And he left. He went to college and he went to Parker-Gray then. I had both boyfriends, Louis and Red. And when we used to go after the football games was over, we walked from Parker-Gray over to the football field which is out there where that Y[MCA] is, all that was a football field where we'd play. And we would walk back and down what we called down the BR(?) where the bus stop is. We used to go down there. We used to have our little high school dances and at that time the dance let out 11:00. And my brother Donald and I go down to the dance and you better come back with my brother Donald, we had to come back together. So this night [laughs] my brother Donald came home. Daddy say, "Where Charlene?" This is what was told me. Donald said, "Uh, she's down there. She's got to tell Red and Louis which one she want." Daddy say, "Which one she want?" [Donald] say, "Yeah, she got to choose because she'd go with both of em. She was going with both of em." Say, my daddy got in his car. And I could see to this moment, I can see his headlights coming across, watching the street coming down. I said, "[gasps] Oh my Lord here come Daddy, look at that." I was standing on the sidewalk. Louis was sitting on what the fireman would get the hose to run the water for a fire? The hydrant. He was sitting on a fire hydrant and Red was standing and I had to choose which one I want. My daddy pulled up. This is just like yesterday. He said, "Charlene!" I said, "Yeah Daddy!" [Daddy said,] "Is that you?" [I said,] "Yeah Daddy, it's me." [Daddy said,] "What you doing over there?" I said, "Well, they want me to choose which one I want." [Daddy said,] "You don't want one of them. Get in his car! And when you get in this car, I'mma beat you when you get home." I got in the car. Daddy took me home. And that was the first time my father ever put his hand[s on me]. He didn't beat me hard. And Louis and Red went on back to the dance. And I was out there [laughs].

Francesco De Salvatore [01:05:49] And you weren't able to make a choice.

Charlene Napper [01:05:51] No, I didn't make no choice at that [time], no, sir, no. But then they both graduated and uh Red went to, uh, I forgot where he went. And Louis went to school. And I was at home, I didn't go to school. I didn't go away. Yes, indeed. It's just like yesterday. Yeah. Hmm. Hmm hmm hmm hmm hmm hmm hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:06:21] What's it like to think about it?

Charlene Napper [01:06:24] It's good. Good memories. Yeah, it's fun memories now. It wasn't fun then, but it's fun now. Yeah. And when Reds married, he married a girl from down at the A and T, Florida A and T where he was. North Carolina A and T, that's what it was. And he brought [his wife] Betty back here, and I was the first person she met when he brought her back here. And they live right down on Alfred Street and right down there. And she and I became [friends], and to this day, Betty and I just like that.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:07:00] Well, you know, you obviously ended up marrying Louis, right?

Charlene Napper [01:07:03] I married Louis, mm hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:07:04] Yeah. Yeah. When did both of you get married?

Charlene Napper [01:07:08] October 28th, 1948.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:07:10] 48, wow. Did you have a wedding? How did you do it?

Charlene Napper [01:07:16] [laughs] We ran away.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:07:18] Really? Can you say more?

Charlene Napper [01:07:21] Yep. We went to Washington and got married. And we came back home. We were scared to let anybody know. I couldn't let my mom and daddy know I was married. He couldn't let his mom and dad know, so he went back down to [01:07:34]Gold [0.0s] Springs (?), where he'd gone back with his daddy. And I came on home on Madison Street.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:07:41] And you didn't tell anyone?

Charlene Napper [01:07:43] That we were married. Because we-

Francesco De Salvatore [01:07:45] How old were you when you got married?

Charlene Napper [01:07:46] 15.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:07:47] 15. Okay, [Charlene laughs] So what ended up happening? I mean, eventually people found out, right?

Charlene Napper [01:07:53] Oh, yeah, they found out. Yeah, yes, yes, indeed found out we got married. And that was the talk of the town then. "Louis and Charlene married." Mm hm.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:08:04] Well, why did you guys decide to get married?

Charlene Napper [01:08:08] Huh?

Francesco De Salvatore [01:08:08] Why did you decide to get married?

Charlene Napper [01:08:10] Oh, I was pregnant, not at the time, but I was pregnant. But they didn't make you get married at that time. But we just, we were in love. And we were in love. And we got married. And then we married and we lived on Patrick Street. We were in the projects also on Patrick Street.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:08:32] Did you guys live in the same house as your family?

Charlene Napper [01:08:35] Yeah, we had our own place right on Patrick Street in the projects.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:08:41] In the Madison Projects?

Charlene Napper [01:08:42] Mm hmm yep.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:08:44] So you ended up leaving your family's house at the Madison [Projects] and you guys got your own?

Charlene Napper [01:08:50] Mm hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:08:51] Okay, wow. So you were pregnant, right? So who are you pregnant with?

Charlene Napper [01:09:00] Louis. Well, Buddie. Well, his name is Charles Richard Napper. That's my oldest son.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:09:07] That's your oldest son?

Charlene Napper [01:09:09] Mm hmm. His name is Charles Richard Napper. He's named after my father and Louis' father. My father was Charles and Louis' father's name was Richard.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:09:22] Can you walk with me, maybe tell us the day he was born, what are your memories?

Charlene Napper [01:09:29] Yeah, May 4th, 1949.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:09:34] What was that like for you to have your son?

Charlene Napper [01:09:36] Oh, my goodness. My girlfriends, oh, they were so happy. We were happy. Oh, my goodness, to see the baby. Yeah, I was happy.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:09:45] So you were 16 probably? 16. Wow.

Charlene Napper [01:09:49] And I had my second son when I was 16. That was Leonard Lee Napper.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:09:55] Leonard Lee Napper. Okay. And you were still living at the Madison Projects [on] Patrick [Street]? Okay. Great. What are some of your memories, being a young mom, raising these two boys?

Charlene Napper [01:10:09] Well, it wasn't no problem with me. I mean, it was just. I guess it was inborn, I don't know, but my mother would come and help me, now, my mother was right there with me. Oh yes. And my grandmother, they were all right there with [me]. We were all close, close, close.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:10:26] What were they like as kids?

Charlene Napper [01:10:33] As kids? Oh, they were just like normal little boys. Yes. And then one time they went out [laughs] on the back. You know, how the projects' alley is and they were up in there playing. And they couldn't make out the house and they were out there just crying. And I went out there. I said, "What's wrong?" They told me the house moved [laughs].

Francesco De Salvatore [01:10:55] The house moved?

Charlene Napper [01:10:55] They were so young. Yeah, the house had moved [both laugh]. Yeah. But, yeah, I have good memories. And my grandparents. Yes, yes. And then that's when I got my, uh my first job was working down on, uh, on a road. I told you about that when I used to make these storm windows. I never made a storm door, I always made the storm windows.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:11:23] What was it called?

Charlene Napper [01:11:24] I forgot, I just can't [re]call the name of the company. But they moved to Washington. And I don't [know] and I guess they out of business by now.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:11:32] Yeah, and that was your first job, right? Wow. Wow.

Charlene Napper [01:11:37] And then I used to work down on Washington Street all the way down, like, almost to Mt. Vernon. I would take care of a little boy there, a little little boy, either a little boy or a little girl. I forgot which now. And I would go down there and worked down there. And then the first real job I got was school crossing guard. And I became a school crossing guard. And I worked for that for 15 years and I retired from that. And the first answering service in the city of Alexandria, I worked at that.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:12:20] Yeah, can you say more about that? Like what was this place?

Charlene Napper [01:12:24] You know, it was right there, overtop the bank right there on Washington Street, was over top the bank. Uh huh. And I worked there. And we answered for doctors, lawyers or Sears when they would get deliveries, whatever. It was just an answering service. Mm hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:12:47] Great.

Charlene Napper [01:12:49] It was called Answering Alexandria. That's what it was called.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:12:54] Answering Alexandria. What year was that? You remember?

Charlene Napper [01:12:57] I don't remember.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:12:58] So like the 50s maybe?

Charlene Napper [01:12:59] More than likely, yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:13:02] That's great.

Charlene Napper [01:13:06] Yep. And I stayed there until I retired from work.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:13:13] Great. And so I know you were living at the Madison Projects with your husband and your two boys. Then you moved again, right?

Charlene Napper [01:13:26] Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:13:26] Where did you move?

Charlene Napper [01:13:28] Right back here. [laughs] He and I had separated when we were in the Projects and we came right back here. And then we separated for about almost 7, almost 8 [quantity of time is not stated]. [01:13:42]

Francesco De Salvatore [01:13:45] Yes, that's right.

Charlene Napper [01:13:45] [laughing] A lot of people didn't even know he was here. But Louis and I got back [together] but we stayed together for about a year, maybe almost 2 years. Then we separated for good. Then we got divorced, and he remarried, and I didn't.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:14:05] And so when you guys separated, so you moved here, right?

Charlene Napper [01:14:08] Mm hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:14:09] And who did you move with?

Charlene Napper [01:14:11] Hmm?

Francesco De Salvatore [01:14:12] Who did you move with here?

Charlene Napper [01:14:14] All of them! All three of my boys. They all was raised right here.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:14:21] Also so-

Charlene Napper [01:14:22] Buddy. Lenny and then Eric. Eric is 8 years younger than Lenny.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:14:30] Right. Okay.

Charlene Napper [01:14:31] Lenny would have been the youngest, but-

Francesco De Salvatore [01:14:33] And didn't your parents, didn't everyone move here?

Charlene Napper [01:14:38] Hmm?

Francesco De Salvatore [01:14:39] Didn't everyone move here, right? Like your parents?

Charlene Napper [01:14:43] My parents were here. Then we moved here, and then all of my nieces. Everybody that had been in this family was raised right in this house. This house got a history.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:14:56] Yeah so, what does this house mean to you?

Charlene Napper [01:14:57] It means everything to me. This house is my life. And I thank God for it every day. This house is paid in full, no taxes, no nothing is owed on this house.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:15:15] When you when you moved over here, what was this area called?

Charlene Napper [01:15:21] It was just, I don't know. We would just, oh, we would call it "On the Hump".

Francesco De Salvatore [01:15:30] Wait, so you would call this area the Hump? Do you know why it was called the Hump?

Charlene Napper [01:15:37] Mm mm. No clue. It was all I knew it called a Hump.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:15:39] Okay. And what were your memories? What does this area look like?

Charlene Napper [01:15:44] It looked just like, other than for these buildings that are coming up around us, these streets have not changed. Nothing has. Right up on the corner of, what is that street, Oronoco Street, that was where the Banner Laundry used to be. The Banner Laundry was there. And then right across the street, right here where that office building is, that's what used to be called Polly Prim. That was a clothes, you know, where they clean clothing, that was called Polly Prim. But other than that, houses. Houses and all black. All in this area.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:16:25] Who were some of your neighbors?

Charlene Napper [01:16:26] Oh, my goodness. The Williams. The Jarretts. Oh, in that red house that one up there next to this house here, that's where, uh, Mr. Ewald lived. John J. Ewald.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:16:43] Who was that?

Charlene Napper [01:16:44] He was head of the city council here in Alexandria. And, uh, somebody asked him why didn't he move. He said, you know, his mother lived up there and he lived with his mother and, uh, you know that John J. Ewald Park down on [Duke Street]? That's named

after him. And, uh, my brothers used to go up there and go to the store for Ms. [Goldie] Ewald and do things for her and all like that. She was a sweet lady, a sweetheart.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:17:20] What were some of the other businesses?

Charlene Napper [01:17:22] There were no businesses.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:17:24] It was just the [Kate Waller Barrett branch] library?

Charlene Napper [01:17:25] It was stores. The library, that was later. That was later for us. But the library was right down on, uh-

Francesco De Salvatore [01:17:34] Queen Street.

Charlene Napper [01:17:35] Mm hm. That was there.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:17:37] You weren't quite living here, but there was a sit-in there right?

Charlene Napper [01:17:41] Yeah, it started from right here. Miss Lockett, it was a little house, right there, I tell you, where the school was. That was Miss Lockett's house and her son and Mr. [Samuel Wilbert] Tucker. And I can't [re]call the other four [William Evans, Edward Gaddis, Morris Murray, Clarence Strange, Otto L. Tucker], but I can see them. It started right there when they did that sit-in. That was the very first sit-in in Alexandria.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:18:17] Do you have memories of that?

Charlene Napper [01:18:19] Yes, indeed! Yes, indeed. Yes. Yes, I remember that well. Mhm.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:18:25] What do you remember about it?

Charlene Napper [01:18:27] That we was wondering why they would be so stupid to go down there [laughing]. Know they could get locked up. That's all we know. But, yes, I remember that very well, very well.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:18:38] Were your parents involved with it?

Charlene Napper [01:18:41] Mm mm. Mm mm, no, mm mm. Just Lockett. Now, I don't remember their father. I don't even remember Miss Lockett's father. And Ray Lockett, he was a secretary to Judge [Irene L.] Pancoast. You heard of Judge Pancoast? Well Ray Lockett was her secretary. Black secretary at that. Mm hmm. And my cousin's, uh, mother, she was wanted down at the, what is the store down there? Can't [re]call the name of the store. Mm mm mm. Anyway she would go and buy clothes and they didn't know she was black. Her name was Katherine. [coughs] Excuse me, I'll get drink of water. I have these nodules. Can you see it? Right there. They're not going to remove them. I tell him at my age what I got, I'm takin with me unless it's absolutely necessary. [to Francesco] All right, Mister!

Francesco De Salvatore [01:20:31] Great. So is there anything else about this neighborhood?

Charlene Napper [01:20:43] I remember when that apartment was built there.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:20:46] Right next door?

Charlene Napper [01:20:48] The next door to this house here, yeah, where that apartment is now? Yeah, that was a private home. That was a home. A black home used to be in there, uh huh.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:21:00] Great. That's great. Um. Okay, and I'm curious, so, like, we're moving into kind of the 50s and 60s here. And I'm just curious, can you tell us what it was like growing up with segregation in Alexandria.

Charlene Napper [01:21:18] Well, really-

Francesco De Salvatore [01:21:19] Like, what was it like for you?

Charlene Napper [01:21:20] You know what? I really can't say I knew anything about segregation because we lived in that time and that's the time we lived in. When we went, my mother would take us to get clothing, to buy clothes, or shoes or something, we could not try on anything they had. If my brothers got a pair of pants, she [Mama] had to hold the pants up to them to their waist and wrap it around them to make sure it would fit and drop it so it would come down. And if I was going to get a dress, she would hold a dress up to my shoulders and bring it down. And going into Murphy's, we could buy. We could not even go into the bathroom. I know that. We couldn't go into the bathroom. We couldn't sit at the counter, but we could order and stand up and go around the side and get it. And right down there on Washington Street used to be the Little Tavern and they would let us get a bite, you know, from there, and go down to the side window and get [it]. And right up on Washington Street at that time that was where the first, uh, what is that called? A big restaurant opened up up there. Mmm. Now in't that something? Hot Shoppe! The Hot Shoppe was there. We could go to the Hot Shoppe and get, not inside. And then there was the, uh, frozen custard right there on Washington Street. But that was open. Anybody could walk up to that. You didn't go in there anyway. And we could get ice cream cones from the, uh, the Three Bears, two little bears on, can't [re]call the name of it now [she may be referring to Beck's ice cream stand that was on 901 N. Washington and had two polar bear statues out front]. My brother Donald, I don't know whether he told you. Did he tell you about him catchin frogs and takin the frogs over to the Hot Shoppe and they would cut the legs off?

Francesco De Salvatore [01:23:50] I think so, yeah.

Charlene Napper [01:23:51] Yes, that's what he did. Yes. Yes.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:23:55] Can you tell that story really quick? But what would he do?

Charlene Napper [01:24:00] My brother? Yes, that's what he did.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:24:02] He'd catch frogs right?

Charlene Napper [01:24:05] Mm hm. Excuse me. This is my spittoon. See, whatever this is, it comes from these nodules. It gets every now and then and I have to [spit it out] if not, it'll cause me to strangle. It is not like coming from a nose it's something that comes up from my throat. Mm hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:24:33] Um. Okay. I'm curious. I know you were involved a little bit with the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People].

Charlene Napper [01:24:48] A little bit. Not much, uh huh.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:24:51] Can you talk about your involvement with them?

Charlene Napper [01:24:53] No, I would just go to the meetings. I had no input. Every now and then you have something to say, but no actual input.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:25:01] Where were the meetings held?

Charlene Napper [01:25:03] I imagined it would be at the Hopkins House. I'm not sure. I'm not sure, it would probably be at the Hopkins House.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:25:10] Where is the Hopkins House?

Charlene Napper [01:25:12] The Hopkins House was then a house. It's not the Hopkins House that's right here on [Princess Street] this big one here. We used to have that Girl Scout [meetings]. I was a Girl Scout. I was a Brownie Scout. A Girl Scout. Don was a Boy Scout. A Cub Scout. All of us was. And they would have most meetings would be held there.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:25:42] Why did you go to those meetings? What made you go to those meetings?

Charlene Napper [01:25:47] I don't know. I guess we just at that time, something to do to find out what was going on.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:25:52] And like what were some of the issues, the things that the NAACP was working on?

Charlene Napper [01:25:59] I really don't remember.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:26:02] Did you testify? Didn't you have to testify at one point?

Charlene Napper [01:26:08] About the swimming pools.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:26:14] Yeah. Can you talk more about that?

Charlene Napper [01:26:17] Oh, yeah. Uh, Lee Fones was head of the Recreation Department at that time and we had to walk from our houses to the swimming pool when they finally integrated the swimming pool. We could not go into where you change your clothes and all like that. And

brought that up. I asked him, would he like to see his mother and his sisters, his children, his daughters walking up a street with a towel draped around them to go into the swimming pool? And he asked me something, he said about why was I getting smart with him? I said, "I'm not getting smart, I'm just asking you a logical," I remember the word, "a logical question that you would ask someone else if this was happening to you and your people, your family." And I got a letter upstairs! I got it from the, uh, no the Recreation Department, the City letting me know that they were letting us go into the pool and to change and bring our clothes and we could change our clothes.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:27:51] And you went to testify about this, right? Didn't the NAACP have something where you testified about it? I think it was at Arlington. Didn't you go to Arlington to testify?

Charlene Napper [01:28:05] Yes, I did. But I forgot what it was for. I do remember going. I had a white dress on. I remember it so clear, but I can't remember what it was for.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:28:17] Was it about the pools? No.

Charlene Napper [01:28:18] I don't know whether it was library, the pool. I just don't-

Francesco De Salvatore [01:28:23] Was it about schools?

Charlene Napper [01:28:25] Oh, I know what it was. I know what it was! The boys was playing football out there. And Luckie Elliot, Luckie was the coach. Do you know Luckie Elliott?

Francesco De Salvatore [01:28:46] I know him, yeah.

Charlene Napper [01:28:46] Ok Luckie was their coach and they were out there playing practice and the city cut the lights out while they were out there and that's what it was. I went for that. That's what it was. And they fired Luckie and I testified and Luckie got his job back. And that's what it was. Yes. But I don't remember all I said. But Luckie can tell you, that's when he got his job back.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:29:16] Wow. Okay.

Charlene Napper [01:29:18] Mm hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:29:19] Okay.

Charlene Napper [01:29:19] Yeah, they cut the lights out on them because they were practicing. It was no game or something Luckie was doing out there with the boys.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:29:31] Well, I know Eric's saying, was it something else?

Charlene Napper [01:29:34] Hmm.

Eric Napper [01:29:35] It was at Arlington. That was at Arlington when you went to testify. Also an article about desegregating the schools. There's an article in, I forget, I was trying to get the name

of the paper that it came out of, but I got a picture of her going into the courthouse up in Arlington. It was about the desegregation of schools back in the 50s.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:30:01] Do you remember that? Going to testify about desegregation in the schools?

Charlene Napper [01:30:05] Yes.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:30:07] Do you remember that part?

Charlene Napper [01:30:07] Yes. Yes, I did.

Eric Napper [01:30:09] In 1957.

Charlene Napper [01:30:12] Yes.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:30:13] Because you had kids, right? That were going into these desegregated schools. Can you tell us a little bit about what that was like?

Charlene Napper [01:30:23] Talking about the desegregation of the school?

Francesco De Salvatore [01:30:26] Yeah, what was that like here in Alexandria as a parent, from your perspective?

Charlene Napper [01:30:31] Well, all I know is, our kids had to walk to school with the busses passing them by. It was horrendous, horrendous. And I do remember going there and, [to her son] Eric I went to Arlington, right?

Eric Napper [01:30:52] Yes, ma'am.

Charlene Napper [01:30:54] And I don't remember all I said, but I do remember going up there and I was one of the keynote speakers for desegregating this. And I'm trying to think of who was the mayor here. What was his name? Oh, I can see him. He was a black guy. My memory's not very good.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:31:23] What school are you talking about specifically?

Charlene Napper [01:31:34] Oh, it was GW [George Washington].

Francesco De Salvatore [01:31:40] GW.

Charlene Napper [01:31:42] Yes, GW. Uh huh.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:31:43] That's where Eric went to school?

Charlene Napper [01:31:46] [to her son] You went to GW, didn't you, Eric?

Eric Napper [01:31:48] But it was demoted to middle school by the time I got there.

Charlene Napper [01:31:50] I can't hear you.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:31:52] It was demoted to middle school.

Charlene Napper [01:31:54] Middle school, right. Mm hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:31:56] Did your older sons go to GW?

Charlene Napper [01:31:59] Mm hmm. Mm hmm. They graduated. Mm hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:32:02] What were the challenges that you faced as a parent with desegregation? How did the process go? Was it easy? Was it, you know, was it difficult?

Charlene Napper [01:32:17] It just wasn't what you call, like the turmoil that you would see other places, but it just wasn't that bad. It wasn't like that. Mm mm.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:32:31] Are there any other memories, anything that I haven't asked you about? You know, the kind of civil rights in Alexandria and, you know, around this period. Is there anything that you want to mention that I haven't asked you about? The one last thing I want to talk to you about was the Elks Lodge.

Charlene Napper [01:32:55] Mm hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:32:56] I know you were involved with the Elks Lodge, right?

Charlene Napper [01:32:58] Yes.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:32:59] Can you talk about your involvement?

Charlene Napper [01:33:01] Yeah. My grandfather, my father's father, was one of the founders of the Elks Lodge down here on Henry Street. And my grandmothers, you know, they were the founders of the Israel Temple. That's for the daughters. There's is Temple number 138. And the Elks Lodge is Elks Lodge number 48. And we were the 39th Lodge in the whole United State that was formed. And all of our family was Elks on the men's side as well as the daughter side. Yes. Mm hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:33:51] What are some of your favorite memories?

Charlene Napper [01:33:53] When we would have every year, [emphasizes] every year, we would have Thanksgiving dinner. And all the recreation centers, they would bring busses with theirs, and we would serve, have big dinners. And then also they would have prayer breakfasts down there. We would have prayer breakfasts. And a lot of the ones from the TV stations would come and speak there. That's where I met Bruce Johnson and all of them right then at our prayer breakfasts we used to have every year. Yes.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:34:37] And is there anything else that you remember that the Elks would do?

Charlene Napper [01:34:41] Yeah! Every Saturday night every entertainer that you hear them speak of now came right down to that Elks home. Every one of them from the Drifters, from The Five Keys, The Temptations. Duke Ellington. Everybody that you could name.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:35:10] Who were some of your favorites?

Charlene Napper [01:35:12] All of them. I can't say mm mm. It's like they asked me about the football. That went off on Sunday? What was that when the -

Francesco De Salvatore [01:35:28] Super Bowl?

Charlene Napper [01:35:29] Super Bowl. They asked me what was my favorite. I said I couldn't either lose nor win. Cuz both of em are my favorites [laughs], I didn't care which one. Mm mm. So I won one and I lost one. So it didn't make no difference to me. But like I say, all of those entertainers, every one of them. And they would be down at the Elks home because they couldn't go to any of the hotels at that time. So when they came, we would feed them in the morning, fix breakfast now for them. For them to leave. That's why some Sundays you couldn't go to church because you had to feed the, you know, get the people ready.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:36:16] That's great. I have some closing questions, but before I ask them, is there anything I haven't asked you that you want to mention right now? Is there anything from your life that you want to make sure that that we record?

Charlene Napper [01:36:30] I can't think of anything except all I know is when we were able to go to the hospital, that was segregated. Alexandria Hospital was desegregated where certain days that we could only go to the hospital on. If you took sick and if that wasn't your day, that's like when I was getting ready to born him [her son Eric]. We could only go on Wednesdays to the clinic, to whatever, whatever, whatever. And I was in labor, had started in labor with him and my Aunt Rosia called a cab, Mr., [to her son] what was the name over here Eric?

Eric Napper [01:37:24] Charity.

Charlene Napper [01:37:26] Deacon Charity with his cab he came and got me and took us down to the hospital and they told me they were sorry, but this was not my day and happened-

Francesco De Salvatore [01:37:39] Wait, when you were pregnant with Eric?

Charlene Napper [01:37:41] I was with Eric, uh huh, and happened. This doctor was coming through at that time, and he said, you know, cuz had been treating me on Wednesdays because he was the doctor on-

Eric Napper [01:38:00] Maternity ward.

Charlene Napper [01:38:02] On the day that we could only go for our time. And she [maternity ward nurse?] said, "Well she's in labor, you know they can't come right now." He [the doctor] said, "Uh uh. Bring her in here. I mean, right now." He is, and I can't [re]call his name. I can't [re]call his name. And he is the only one. He got me ready, took me, walked with me up to that labor delivery room, got me prepped. I had to have to him by Caesarean cuz he was coming as a breach. And if that hadn't happened, he and I both would have died. Yes, I will never forget that time. Mm hmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:38:58] Wow. I'm sorry you went through that.

Charlene Napper [01:38:59] Yep. But then after that, that's when they started to regulate, you know? Letting it be open, you know? The emergency room. And if you took sick and they had to keep you in hospital, they did not put you in the rooms. They kept you in the hall, lined up on wall, beside the wall. But they would come and treat you. But you were not in no room like the other persons. Mm hmm. Yeah. I remember that very vividly.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:39:38] Sure.

Charlene Napper [01:39:39] And I had my other two boys, I had them at home. Midwife.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:39:48] Is there anything else I haven't asked that you want to mention?

Charlene Napper [01:39:52] I can't think of anything. [to her son] Eric was there anything we've talked about that I forgot?

Eric Napper [01:40:00] That's everything that me and you had talked about. Yeah, other than T.C. [Thomas Chambliss] Williams, the man T.C. Williams when he was talking about integration for that. We talked a little bit about that, how he didn't want no black kids-

Charlene Napper [01:40:22] Oh, T.C. Williams, that's what T.C. [Williams High School] was named after, T.C. Williams. He said hell would freeze over before he would say it weren't any blacks coming into that school, and that's what T.C. Williams [High School] was named after. So evidently he's in hell. So it integrated [laughing].

Francesco De Salvatore [01:40:41] It integegrated [laughing].

Charlene Napper [01:40:47] Thank you, Eric. Yes, he did, T.C. Williams uh huh. And they've changed it. I don't know. But it's called Alexandria City [High] School now. I still call it T.C. Williams, though. Oh, and I remember when they removed that Confederate soldier from the middle of Washington Street, but where the post office used to be. I remember that. And I remember the George Mason Hotel. I remember when they integrated that also. That was right across the street from then the post office. I remember that. Mm hmm. Mm hmm. And when Earl Lloyd came back, he had been away playing ball, and he came back. First thing he did [laughs], he went down there and got a room in the hotel because it was the first time he'd ever been, other than working. You could work there, but you couldn't [stay as a guest]. And then when you worked there, you had to go around the back door. You couldn't even go in the front door, uh uh, and the maids and everything. But Earl went right down there and got a room at the George Mason Hotel for one night. He said that was the highlight of his life. Be at the George Mason Hotel [laughing].

Francesco De Salvatore [01:42:09] Wow, that's great. Well, I have some closing questions I wanna ask you. So like, I'm curious. Like, what are some of the most important lessons that you've learned in your life?

Charlene Napper [01:42:20] How to treat people the way you want to be treated. That's the main lesson, because we're all human. And just because I'm another color, you another color, that don't mean that there's any differences with our likes, our dislikes, what we need and what we want. We want the best for our families. The best for our children's education and that's about all I can say now. And I'm blessed that my 90 years I have lived to see that come to pass. And we still got a ways to go. But it's nothing, nothing compared. Only thing is, it's more submerged, that it was more open during those years. But that will soon pass also, because people are beginning to understand we are all human.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:43:33] And if you can hold on to any memory or memories from your life, well, what would they be?

Charlene Napper [01:43:39] With my mother and my father. My great-grandmother and my grandmother and raising my children. My great-grandmother would sit in that rocking chair and rock. And every evening, [emphasizes]every evening, we had to be quiet. That was her prayer time. Whether we prayed or not, we had to be quiet. And during a storm, an electrical storm if it was lightning and thundering, lights went out, everything went out, you know what she always said that was? She said the thunder was God's voice and the lightning was the blinking of his eyes. And we had to respect the thunder and the lightning. Yes. Yes. I remember that so well.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:44:43] And what do you hope for for your children? For Eric? For-

Charlene Napper [01:44:51] For his grandchildren?

Francesco De Salvatore [01:44:54] Or no, for him and your other sons? What do you hope for them?

Charlene Napper [01:44:57] Well, I only have Eric. That his life will be productive, that God will give him good health, longevity, and that he can enjoy every moment that God has for him in store and that he be the father and the grandfather to his children that he is the son to me, his mother. I pray that.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:45:27] How about how about your grandchildren? What do you hope for them?

Charlene Napper [01:45:30] I wish the same thing, that the families can stay together as a family and that we will love each other as a family. Be as a family. And not be distant. And don't think anyone is any higher or any lower than the other. Although some may not have escalated to where some are, we are still family. And that's what I pray that we can always, always be family.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:46:07] It's great. That's great. Well, thank you so much, Miss Napper.

Charlene Napper [01:46:11] I hope I didn't bore you.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:46:13] Oh, no, I'm not bored. I'm not bored. Thank you so much.