

Interview with Ms. Betty Lawson

Conducted by Hilary Jones

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First African Baptist Church

Tuscaloosa, Alabama

Ms. Betty Lawson was born in Hartford, Alabama, in Geneva County in 1936. She grew up with her parents and twelve siblings, all working on a farm. In 1955 she moved to Tuscaloosa and began attending First African Baptist church. She finished her undergraduate studies at Stillman College and later attained her Master's Degree from the University of Alabama. She taught school for thirty-seven years at Holt Elementary School and then another three years in the kindergarten of First African Baptist. Her first year of teaching at Holt was the first year of integration in the Tuscaloosa County Schools.

Ms. Lawson is heavily involved in First African Baptist and was present for the event known as Bloody Tuesday. She was delivering food to the rally, arriving after the police had begun to use force to quell the marchers' enthusiasm. She remembers seeing policemen inside the church building hitting several marchers while other officials outside shot tear gas and firehoses at the church building, breaking the windows of the church. In this interview, Ms. Lawson also discusses how real estate planning was used to segregate neighborhoods of Tuscaloosa.

HILARY: Alright, so, Ms. Betty Lawson, where were you born?

MS. LAWSON: I was born in Hartford Alabama, and that's in Geneva County.

HILARY: Okay, and when was that?

MS. LAWSON: That was in March [of] '36.

HILARY: Okay and you grew up there?

MS. LAWSON: Yes.

HILARY: Do you have any siblings?

MS. LAWSON: I do. I'm a younger child of thirteen siblings. The youngest.

HILARY: Okay so, what was it like growing up there?

MS. LAWSON: It was great. It was - my family was - we had a farm. So I grew up on a farm. But I had a good childhood, background.

HILARY: Yes ma'am, did you go to church when you were growing up too?

MS. LAWSON: I did. My children did. That was part of my bringing up. Church experience.

HILARY: Okay, so when did you move to Tuscaloosa?

MS. LAWSON: I moved to Tuscaloosa in 1955.

HILARY: Is that when you started going here? [implying First African Baptist Church]

MS. LAWSON: Yes.

HILARY: How old were you at that time?

MS. LAWSON: I can't say that but when I came here I was just married and I lived right... those houses on that street there. I lived there close to the church.

HILARY: Okay, so, growing up what type of school did you go to, like how do you remember your school?

MS. LAWSON: At first, my first three years was like a Christian school, like a church school. Then I went to Junior High, in a regular elementary school - junior high, and high school. Then I first attended Alabama State College, and my mother got sick, and I didn't finish there. So she wanted me to be near my sister - one of my sisters in Birmingham, so I went to [inaudible] College.

HILARY: Yes Ma'am.

MS. LAWSON: Then after that I got married.

HILARY: Okay.

MS. LAWSON: Then I went back to Stillman College and finished up there. Then I went to the University of Alabama and got my masters there.

HILARY: Awesome, so what jobs have you had over the year.

MS. LAWSON: [Laughs] This is fun, this is fun, this is fun. I taught school for thirty-seven years at one school.

HILARY: Oh wow.

MS. LAWSON: Three years in kindergarten so I have a record of 40 years of teaching. So I'm excited about my teaching career [Laughs].

HILARY: Wow yes ma'am that's awesome. What all schools have you taught at?

MS. LAWSON: One school! Holt! [Laughter] Holt Elementary. I taught thirty-seven years there. I did three years here at kindergarten. That makes my forty years.

HILARY: Wow.

MS. LAWSON: I just love that part of me.

HILARY: Yes ma'am my mom taught -

MS. LAWSON: Because I was never asked to leave and I never would have wanted to leave. My kids wanted me to leave, they wanted me to teach closer but it's not that far, out to Holt.

HILARY: Yes ma'am. When you started teaching was that after they had already integrated the schools?

MS. LAWSON: You know what? It was the very first year.

HILARY: Oh really? That's interesting.

MS. LAWSON: Mhmm. The very first year. So it was a lot of tension, a lot of stress on administrators, and a lot of trying to get it right with parents and that kind of thing, but I made it. And I enjoyed it! I enjoyed it. You know, we had some problems with parents [on] both sides. But, we made it through and did the best we could. Never had anybody that was really - I never had a fight or anything with parents or anything like that. But I had parents just say ugly things so - things like that.

HILARY: When it was first integrated, was it more so one race versus the other or was it pretty well proportioned?

MS. LAWSON: At Holt, see that first year it was just like the black school had closed - was closed. And the white school was larger so the ratio was different. The ratio was really more whites.

HILARY: Yes ma'am, because one thing that we've talked about and discussed in class too, and I would like your opinion on this, is the way that the schools are now. How they're zoned how it seems like - do you know what I'm talking about?

MS. LAWSON: Mhmm [yes].

HILARY: Yes ma'am, how they're very - yeah de facto segregated.

MS. LAWSON: [Expressions of agreement] That's really depressing, distressing, to me, to see after fifty years of trying to get it right, if we were to just pull up everybody today, it's almost equally or even worse. Because when I came to Tuscaloosa, many people, like around that corner whites lived there. Back here [points behind her] whites. And I had been used to whites. I lived just across the road with whites. I had been used to growing up. However, I knew whites/blacks. They respected us. They liked us. We ate out of the same pots or pans or whatever, we played, but when it was time to go to school again, *they* went on the bus and we walked. How about that?

HILARY: Yeah that's...

MS. LAWSON: Mhmm. They went on the bus but you see now, children are... they, they don't have to walk, but they're being bussed. Maybe, perhaps, against their will, lack of knowledge, whatever. But when I look at the setting, it's almost worse. If I had a choice I would go back to where I was. And start to clear it up.

HILARY: Yes. I'm not from Tuscaloosa I'm from Jackson, Mississippi, but I could notice that about Tuscaloosa. The schools are very... it's very segregated.

MS. LAWSON: Mhmm. You know where Oakdale is?

HILARY: Yes.

MS. LAWSON: Okay, at one time that school was totally white.

HILARY: Really?

MS. LAWSON: Total white. And that area was total white. And, they went to their school we went to our school. And then, as the flight took place, people moved out of that area. Then the school was, you know. But that's the truth, that's really the truth and, the houses and all it was white, it was a white area. But you see people didn't really mind the areas. Just like whites live in this area. Blacks live in this area. But, somehow now this is worse.

HILARY: So...

MS. LAWSON: I don't know how it got into this shape.

HILARY: I know, I know that's what I was going to say is how to fix it - that's just like confounding to me. But you started coming to First African Baptist when? What year did you say it was?

MS. LAWSON: It was maybe fifty...six. 1956.

HILARY: Were you here for Bloody Tuesday?

MS. LAWSON: I was.

HILARY: You were?

MS. LAWSON: I was.

HILARY: Can you tell us your story about that?

MS. LAWSON: Uh, that was under the Pastor T.Y. Rogers...

HILARY: Yes ma'am.

MS. LAWSON: Uh huh, that Tuesday. And, I had attended, I attended church always. Here. I had never belonged to another church here in Tuscaloosa. But it just like, you would be surprised. Like I told you I used to work here in the kindergarten. It was planned - it was a planned meeting for Civil Rights, and I wasn't here at the beginning of the service but I came down, it used to be called 9th Street, Stillman Boulevard. It was 9th Street. And I was wondering what was wrong! I saw the firehose and the fire department, and some ladies at my church told me "don't come in, go home, go home." And I thought why did they want me to go? But they were in a room, because they had been pushed back there.

HILARY: Was it in that back room? Behind the Sanctuary?

MS. LAWSON: Part of that building has been torn down. But it was in what we called the Educational building and part of it has been torn down but they were telling me to go. And I had sandwiches. The community would fix sandwiches for the people that were here. And, I had sandwiches and I was wondering where do I go? And as I started to come in, another lady from my church had sandwiches from her community and they told us to go back, go back. So, we really had to just throw the sandwiches in and some person was being hit, and I remember, it was Ms. Odessa Warrick. She was screaming and she was in the floor and I thought "what is this going on?" But the water hose and they were doing the water spray. But now, we had to leave and that afternoon, later, they had a meeting at another church. But, it was just awful because people were being hit and our windows were...

HILARY: Being broken?

MS. LAWSON: Yeah, broken, yeah. It was just awful.

HILARY: Yes ma'am, we've heard two different stories. I think Rev. Linton, do you know Rev. Linton?

MS. LAWSON: I do.

HILARY: He said that the police officers came into the church and then somebody else said that they were outside of the church. Do you, do you know which one you think...

MS. LAWSON: When I came in it was one or two because they were hitting Ms. Warrick. There was a couple I know that was inside. But, people were being brought out. You know some

coming out because of the tear gas. And then some was being forced out. That kind of thing. And it could have been another exit or entrance that he was in because I was going in like the kitchen area.

HILARY: Okay so you were coming down from like this way? [Motions]

MS. LAWSON: Yeah well the kitchen area was there but I was going up the door... to the kitchen.

HILARY: Okay, okay.

MS. LAWSON: And the sanctuary, you know where the sanctuary is. But, people were there and you see they had water and I was like “why would anybody have water spraying the church?” That kind of thing. But the water process, it went on and on. And the gas process it lasted for days and weeks. We would have to open the windows to get it out.

HILARY: That is awful.

MS. LAWSON: It had to be cleaned.

HILARY: Did you have any other involvement in the movement? Like any walks or, just like speeches that you went to anything?

MS. LAWSON: Now I did go to speeches, but I, I had three kids and 2 of my kids were the first that went to Alberta Elementary. It was five kids that went. I had 2 and another lady had two kids and another had one kid. So, five kids. I was really investing my time in the Board of Education because I would have to go out there. They’d ask me why did you want to go? Was my school in the area not [good enough]? I did not want that. I wanted to test it. It wasn’t really a test but it was just something I wanted to do! I wanted my kids to have the very best and, they went to Alberta Elementary School. They were the first five children out there in that school area.

HILARY: Yes ma’am.

MS. LAWSON: So it was just before I started teaching. And I would have to get up and take them and then go to - go up to Stillman. You know, it was a lot, it was a strenuous journey. I don’t know if I could do it now! [Laughter] I know I could do it now, but uh, in the thought process if I could think it out I probably wouldn’t do it. Buh, it was worth it, it was worth it.

HILARY: When you went to speeches, or even in church, do you remember, because our class is about religion and civil rights, we’ve talked a lot about how religion played a role in Civil Rights and encouraged people. Do you remember religion specifically being brought any in the speeches that you went to?

MS. LAWSON: I think when I look back it was a faith walk. You know, if you didn’t have faith, if you didn’t have a belief, you maybe wouldn’t have been a part of it. It was just the faith that people had that carried them through. You know, that God is going to see them through this. And uh, we survived because God said that we would survive. And so people relied heavily upon their faith, so I just think it was a faith walk. It was the timing, people had gotten tired - enough was enough.

HILARY: Absolutely.

MS. LAWSON: Enough is enough! And something needed to be done about that because most people had been brought up with the whites, you know? But it was separation even, like pay scales. In the City Schools, you know, in the City Systems. And both systems, County too! The pay scales were totally different. And Pastor T.Y. Rogers was one of the first people to find out this pay scale was different. Black teacher – white teacher, same degree. So, they started publishing in newspapers about Masters Degree, BS degree. And, we're not sure if it was really right, but at least people were aware of that. Yeah if a person has a masters he's going to make a bit more. That makes sense, you know.

HILARY: And how did that change? How did the difference in the pay scale. Was it because of T.Y. Rogers bringing attention to it?

MS. LAWSON: Yes that changed a lot of things because see, we didn't have any black teachers. It was just like black teachers, black school. And then, as the process went on it was just like you got the - it's not fair to send all white children or black children to one school and there's no black teachers there. You know? They needed to at least be able to identify - and then I think the struggle with the City board, County board too was to shifted people different places. Because we had a couple of people here that were shifted from black schools to white. So that's really how they did it. You know, gradually this. Gradually whites go here, blacks go over here. You know, kind flip-flop.

HILARY: Yes ma'am. How, with religion, and you were talking about faith and stuff, how do you think white churches around here that claim to believe in the same God can justify being so segregationist and oppressive? Because that's what we've talked about. It's confusing. Like you can't understand.

MS. LAWSON: Well, your faith is your belief in God. And, some of it is rooted, is ground, this is what my grandfather did. And it's just there. And it's going to take time to heal it. It's going to take time to wash away. As far as their faith in God... they have faith in God, whites have faith in God. But, they have been used to... It's better. And, that's going to take some time. But as far as treating right, belief in God, it's more or less the same.

HILARY: Yes Ma'am.

MS. LAWSON: But you see, if you haven't had an experience - my faith is because I saw God work in my life. And if you haven't had that experience, you may not be as knowledgeable, or you may not have that tender faith that another person had. Because you didn't experience that. And, if you can't go back any further than your grandparents or great-grandparents, you didn't see what I saw. I *saw*, I felt, and I heard my grandfather talk about the ships from Africa, the coming over here against your will. And, when - you know, no one's imagination can really tell what it was like, feel what it was like coming from another continent. They don't speak my dialect, they don't speak my language, the food is different, and all this kind of thing. So it was just a lot of things that people had experienced and it made your faith grow. Because you know that God took care of you. You come from a different environment, you see all that cotton out

there, there's no cotton in Africa, but you were put here and because people thought you were inferior then you're going to - people are going to make profit off of you. It was a profit thing. Low pay. No pay! Maybe working to survive. You've got three, four, five, six, seven kids. No assurance of anything, you just work the land and take what's left over. That's the way it was. So, I think we've grown and I think, even spiritually we've grown. This church came out of First Baptist Downtown. Mhmm. And it's only been once that the pastor there came here, which was during the administration of Reverend Pitts. The pastor came here, and it was just like a service. Just, just a reminder. But it was different, even in our church history it was different. People worshipped with them, it was just.. it was really more blacks than it was whites, and they worshipped together. But, blacks didn't have the right to be a part of the service. It was just like maybe you worshipping from the balcony, or you're worshipping someplace else and you did not participate.

HILARY: And when was that?

MS. LAWSON: That was in 18... in the 1860s, right out of [inaudible]. The development of this church! We came out of First Baptist Downtown.

HILARY: Okay, I see what you're saying now.

MS. LAWSON: Uh huh, and to come out and we established this church. Now this church is we just celebrated our 149th.

HILARY: Oh yeah I saw that!

MS. LAWSON: Uh huh, 149th church anniversary. And it's a big thing. You know, it's just nothing but a period of reflection, and this is where religion and Christianity comes in. God You brought us. 149 years from this to this in our faith and in our doing, and I think as far as worship, people, they always worship closely to the same thing. But, when you're in a setting and you don't see any whites you know you hardly run into them. And they didn't participate, they couldn't participate that's what made them so tired. You know I want to be a part of that worship. I want to read the scripture. I want to say something. I want to sing. And that was painful. Because it was suppressing my emotions and feelings. So, it's been a journey, it's been a journey across the board. But I maybe go back to the school system. That's what you all are trying to address?

HILARY: Well, we've been addressing pretty much the Civil Rights movement in Tuscaloosa as a whole, and we've talked about how far it's come and the changes that have happened in Tuscaloosa and then how much further Tuscaloosa has to go, so we've tied in the school system to that. But any thoughts you have on it we would love to hear them.

MS. LAWSON: I just think we've gone back! Regression here, and you can almost just look, you don't have to know anything about it. And it could have been white flight. See we didn't know what was happening - white flight. "I'm going to sell you all this property down here," [then] when you get through selling all the property see the people are gone. "There's a big school down here, it's really nice. Y'all are going to have a school in your neighborhood," but

we really didn't need that. We would have been better off...just doing all that kind of stuff. This was something planned, somebody planned this.

HILARY: Uh huh, that's what we were talking about it's very gerrymandered.

MS. LAWSON: And we had one mayor. I gave him the credit for his...his great big plan [chuckles]. But it was just the white flight. Like I said, people in this community, the whites - we used to have whites who belonged to this church. Because...

HILARY: Really?

MS. LAWSON: Yeah, mmmm. When I first came here...I guess about, maybe a dozen people came and worshipped. But during the T.Y. Rogers era, and they started having the movement and that kind of stuff they kind of left. But whites would come in sometimes, they came here a lot of times. You know, lots of times they would come. Not just a special occasion, but they would come for a regular service.

HILARY: Yes ma'am.

MS. LAWSON: But I think when you start pulling out people and selling this house, or saying "We got to get this cleared out." See he did it and he was discreet about doing that. People bought into it because he was discreet.

HILARY: Absolutely

MS. LAWSON: You know? You get the good house.

HILARY: It's very planned.

MS. LAWSON: And when you wake up...when you wake up from the fairytale. [Chuckles]

HILARY: You don't realize that kind of thing when it's happening.

MS. LAWSON: No no no!

HILARY: It's years down the road that you see that it happened.

MS. LAWSON: Yes.

HILARY: Yes ma'am. So going back to your grandfather. I found that very interesting. He came from Africa?

MS. LAWSON: Oh, My great grandfather, he came from Africa. You would never know it when - I have a picture, you would never know that. But it was the things he told my grandfather and stuff like that. I don't think he ever did a lot of things that some people did. See some people get through the cracks. And I think my great-grandfather was one of those people that got through the cracks - and my grandfather too. Because I remember as a child, he was something like a bondsman. You know? [Laughs] It was just like people would say he's a ward. They didn't use bondsman. But you know if somebody got in jail, my grandfather said, "Well, you know he's

going to work it out,” and this kind of stuff. He got out. So he just like, to me that was kind of like a bondsman. That kind of thing.

HILARY: So he just could pull some strings.

MS. LAWSON: Yeah! You know, that’s his word, that’s his bond, if he said that it was going to happen. That’s where people ended up happening. You don’t have to have competence to get things like that. But uh, he was that kind of person. And uh, he was a very religious man. Methodist church. You know, he was Methodist. [Chuckles] He just had a great faith, great faith. He prayed deep, cried, shouted. And I sometimes think of him now you know...how he would pray and he would say, “Lord, bless my children and my children’s children.” And I would say...[Laughs] what is he saying? You know and look now, that’s my children and my children’s children. But now I appreciate that so much. Because it was like he was speaking into my life. He was speaking into my life and he was praying for me, so it was just like a generational thing. He was touching my generation and my children’s generation. And I can’t ask for much more than that. See, that’s things that people can’t buy.

HILARY: Priceless things, yes ma’am.

MS. LAWSON: God, no, you know what? If I had some money I couldn’t buy, what it meant to me then. Then, back then I was just “What is he saying?” You know?

HILARY: But now you understand it.

MS. LAWSON: I understand that it’s not over...with his children. I’ve got to pray for my children and my children’s children. [Laughs] It’s a generational thing. It was biblical, part of his faith, it was part of what he knew to do. It was great.

HILARY: Yes ma’am. Do you remember any like...specific stories that he told you that you found interesting, that stuck with you?

MS. LAWSON: You know...I thought they were stories. And we used to love to hear Grandpapa tell stories. He would tell like his grandfather, like his dad had told about those ships. And he would tell stories like it was Mermaids. You know what Mermaids are?

HILARY: Yes ma’am.

MS. LAWSON: And how people would be wrapped up in there...with the Mermaid, and move down in the bottom of the ship, and they - some would be fed, some people died and all this kind of thing. But people that were light, would sometimes wrap and would go down to the bottom of the ship, and they would be fed and they would be treated different. Now I didn’t understand it then, and he probably didn’t get the whole meaning of it. But really when I saw the first slave ships, the light came on. Those ships are made with those decks. You know what I’m talking about?

HILARY: Yes ma’am, like multiple levels?

MS. LAWSON: Yeah, and down in the deck, down in the lower place than I thought, those Mermaids, it was just people they had a preference for sometimes would be taken in areas and

maybe given a little bit of food. Some people didn't make it because of food. You know that, don't you?

HILARY: Yeah.

MS. LAWSON: And it may have been favor toward somebody that they got taken...

HILARY: ...down there and taken care of.

MS. LAWSON: Yeah, because he would talk about taking them and feeding them and it didn't make much sense to me...how some got taken to the bottom of ships...

HILARY: Not being able to eat, you know that's just...

MS. LAWSON: But see when you become an adult, look at the ships...how they're made and how they're stacked. Put it all together. It becomes clear as to what was happening.

HILARY: Yes ma'am.

MS. LAWSON: So it was stories like that, you know. And they didn't do as much play as we do now, you know. It was very little play. But they had little games that they played. They, I guess all the children, would create play. They would create games to do something during the times. Because you know that's what children are about, they have to have some play. [Laughs]

HILARY: They do. I have a little brother who's six, well he's about to be six in like two weeks, and he's all about that. [Laughs] He can play with...the air, I swear.

MS. LAWSON: [Laughs] Right! They have to have play, children, so...he would tell, you know, that they played different games, and they didn't have the games that we did, you know now. But they would have some games. And they would create games. I was telling somebody not too long ago about how children used to draw hopscotch. Hopscotch, you know? It wasn't always that you had a piece of plastic, but people would take a stick, draw, you know, and they would just do things like that.

HILARY: Now it's iPads...

MS. LAWSON: Yeah! You know, they didn't miss the fun of it.

HILARY: It's crazy just how things have changed from when I was little to my little brother. Because I have a surprise little brother, like he was not expected, love him to death, it's just crazy because I didn't have all that stuff. Even when I was little there was no iPhones and iPads.

MS. LAWSON: Mhmm, stuff like that. And now he's playing, and he doesn't hear anything anybody's saying. Because he's touching a button. But I got the hopscotch, and you know I just played the game. You know, to get out there physically. And do that jump on one foot. He couldn't do it.

HILARY: Yes ma'am.

MS. LAWSON: So it was a good experience. You know, like children would...I guess my sister's brother, because I'm kind of like your brother, I was like a not planned kid, you know.

HILARY: Yes ma'am. Going back to First African Baptist and T.Y. Rogers, do you have any memories of him being here? We've talked a lot about T.Y. Rogers.

MS. LAWSON: Yes. He came here as pastor. And he was just a brilliant guy. He sang well...he didn't sing well but he knew music. And it was just I think the timing, not all he was...now most people could not have done what he did. Because he was an educated, brilliant guy. He went to...I think it's Crozer Seminary in Philadelphia. He studied there, and he had met Martin Luther King there, and both of them being from Alabama, you know, just kind of...

HILARY: Connected, yes ma'am.

MS. LAWSON: Mhmm, that part. But he came as a great pastor. And then it...like I said the timing was just right when he got here. The tiredness of the people. You just get tired. We need to get out of this now, we're tired of this. He was able to provide leadership. And with King being a person of..."we can't do this with fighting, we got to do it with peace, we got to be gentle." Well you got to calm people down to be gentle. [Laughs] Because we had to get used to that. No fighting back. Because that's not human nature.

HILARY: Yes ma'am. Do you remember a lot of people agreeing with King's like, the peaceful protests? Or were a lot of people fed up with taking a peaceful route?

MS. LAWSON: Everybody didn't agree with that. We had to get used to that. You know, it was the better plan, the plan that he had - the peaceful plan was better than the physical plan. You know that's where he and Malcolm X disagreed. But you know Malcolm was like, "Let's get some sticks let's get some stuff, let's get it on." But King's thought process was no, we can't fight. We won't win. This was the spiritual part of it. [Laughs] The spiritual part of it has got to click in you know. And we had some fighting ones in spite of all. We had some out here. Some other things would go on. During Rogers' administration, he did get people organized. We had boycotts in places that you didn't go into. They sometimes went into those places you know, and even the better stores. You know, we can't have jobs there, we're not going to buy.

HILARY: What was Tuscaloosa like during segregation? As far as you said, boycotts. Like what were some of the main places that would be boycotted or sit-ins, anything like that. I really don't know, like anything about what it was about during the segregation era.

MS. LAWSON: Well the schools. You know that part, about the schools. You know the school part.

HILARY: But like the city.

MS. LAWSON: Well just like eating places, you know. You didn't have that many eating places down there. Whatever you had it was just like, whites go in the front door. You got the back door. If you got some food, if they sold food to blacks, it would be another entrance. Going downtown to buy even a dress, whatever. You always just went to the back. You would just go to the back for more or less everything. You know I see this pretty dress and I think it'll fit you.

Bring you something, you know. And people didn't like that but it's just the way it was. And it was just a line, colored. Most of the time it was colored. Some places maybe had black, white. Some places had colored, white. And if you wanted some water, "That's your side, that's my side." Your side is always better than my side. We did have just enough to say, I can get some water. Just enough to say, this is a bathroom facility. Because see like you travel now. Like, you know, there weren't any restroom facilities or anything like that. You may be going to Montgomery and I think my kids were in this one, I think it was Guff. Guff has turned into another service station. But they made a children's restroom there. See but you didn't...don't leave here thinking you were going to go down there and get some food on down in Geneva County. You fixed your food, you made your food before you - you fried your chicken, you had your bananas, you had your apples, whatever you wanted the kids to have. You did that, but you didn't go thinking, I'm going to get a hamburger. If you found a place where they sold hamburgers, you had to find an entrance at the back.

HILARY: And not all places had one?

MS. LAWSON: No! No. Just to get some food.

HILARY: That's so awful.

MS. LAWSON: Mhmm. And I guess as time passed, and this is what a lot of uh Rogers did, was to boycott those places. And to have a sit-in. And it broke it right down, because you were like, well people are going to lose money. Because even some whites were participating. You know I'm not going to pay. You know they were maybe used to sitting there, but you know this has gone too far. This has gone too far. Everybody's heart was not that way. It was a struggle but he led us, and this church did prosper under his administration spiritually. You know, it grew. Now a lot of the people that came, they didn't come to church here, they had their own church. They would go back where they did, but they came for the Civil Rights Movement, see what we're going to boycott, this kind of thing, this kind of stuff. And they did some teaching, preaching. You know? During some of the sermons.

HILARY: Did you ever hear MLK speak?

MS. LAWSON: Yes. He identified...not identified. He uh, gave the...

HILARY: Did he come here?

MS. LAWSON: Yeah, he did, he did. He came here for the inauguration, the inauguration for the pastor. He did that for us - for this church. And maybe two or three other times he came. And it was probably sometimes that he came not for a service, but maybe just to see him [Rogers], and that kind of stuff. But he was...part of our worship.

HILARY: That's awesome, that's very cool. When Tuscaloosa did become integrated do you remember any pushback or any specific instances of pushback that you experienced? I know you were in the schools or any stores or anything? Just people just that did not agree with it, just very being awful?

MS. LAWSON: It was probably some of - a little bit of fighting. There was fighting, sometimes the Klan would come up. You know and they would...

HILARY: Did you ever see them?

MS. LAWSON: No, but [Robert] Shelton used to stay out on 15th street, and he would have his guys, you know and there would be some other people...and you know it was non-violent, he wasn't supposed to have a stick. Nothing physical, that you could do physically. But some people would use, you better not touch me. They would just fill up you know, and they just took a chance. Because even though the Movement was about non-violence, that won't go away in a night. It won't go away in six months. You've got to be talked at, you've got to be trained. You've got to be ready, you know? Because sometimes human nature is...

HILARY: Is violence.

MS. LAWSON: Yeah. It'll kick in on you, you know.

HILARY: Absolutely. Did you ever travel out of the south any? Did you ever go anywhere that was not segregated during segregation down here?

MS. LAWSON: I don't know. I had some, my husband had people in New York and it wasn't as bad there you know. It just wasn't as bad. And I think even living in my hometown, the smaller towns, we knew where we could go but it was still black-white. It was still bad in those smaller places but people began to catch on. And some people it was a loss. Sometimes it was people that were hired to do things, to make the cooking, stuff like that they walked off the job and so...it was a loss in some ways too, to even whites.

HILARY: Yes ma'am. How far do you think Tuscaloosa has come since you moved here? In terms of race relations?

MS. LAWSON: Made some progress. Made *some* progress, but we have not arrived.

HILARY: What else do you think needs to be done?

MS. LAWSON: It's still law, invisible law. It's still a shield. You know it's still not truthfully there. We've not arrived. We're not where we need to be. Now, we made some progress. We've got a fine mayor who's doing a great job. But it's just not all there.

HILARY: Yes ma'am. On campus there's been like a lot of talk about stuff like banning the Confederate flag and stuff like that. How do you feel about things like that? Do you think it would make race relations better or worse?

MS. LAWSON: I don't know. Some have been taken down, and as a black person, sometimes we ignore things. But it's there. It's a reminder. People need to be reminded, some people are trying to forget. Some people forever want that. But you can't clean the slate until you wipe it? And as long as it's there, the slate's not clean.

HILARY: Yes ma'am. I'm from Mississippi, and I don't know if you're aware what our state flag looks like but the top left corner of it like is a Confederate flag, and the rest of it is blue and white. But anyway, it has the Confederate flag on it, so we've had a lot of talk about.

MS. LAWSON: You all have to do something about it.

HILARY: Well, they haven't done anything unfortunately. Ole Miss took the flag down, which is good. Some people are throwing a fit about it, some people are really happy. They've talked a lot about changing - I think they're planning on changing the state flag. Which I think that they need to, that's a no brainer. But a lot of people are against it, saying it's like erasing history. But like you said it's something, it's not erasing history, it's erasing the bad history. It's not erasing it, it's like wiping a slate clean and getting rid of a reminder that can hurt people.

MS. LAWSON: And see that brings in your faith, you know? I say, I've come to Jesus, I've forgotten my sin, God you've forgiven me. But I still want to hang up this stuff. [Laughs] You see it, Lord, you see it? He says, "No, you don't need that." He wants you to take that away.

HILARY: Uh-huh, I would say so. I would think if Jesus was here he would.

MS. LAWSON: He would come, he would take that away. You've been covered by the blood. So you don't need to bring that up. We want to put that down. And so that's the same thing about the flag. No, we've forgiven, we've crossed that river, but you still want to hang it up. So I don't know what we're doing. [Chuckles]

HILARY: And people say stuff like, it didn't start out as racist, and I say well one that's not true, and two, well it doesn't matter, it developed into a racial symbol, and that, anyway so. That's my soapbox. [Laughs]

MS. LAWSON: Like I said, we've made progress with race. Progress has been made. But we have not arrived.

HILARY: Yes ma'am. What are some things you would tell today's generation? Of children or school-aged kids, you being a teacher. What is something, like a teachable life lesson?

MS. LAWSON: You need to know your history.

HILARY: I'm a history major, so I agree. [Laughs]

MS. LAWSON: [Laughs] We're on the same page. You profit from your history. You move on from your history. But you need to know it. It makes you a better person.

HILARY: It does, and you learn from it.

MS. LAWSON: Mhmm. You can see progress. Even mentally. I don't think what I used to think. You know, God has healed some places in my life, so I can move on. But you see, as long as that hurt is there, it's hard to heal. You got to get the hurt out of the way. Like I said, you got to get the hurt out of the way. But, I would say to any young people, to study. If you make any progress, it's going to be education.

HILARY: Yes, I completely agree. I love studying, so. [laughs] I'm right there with you on that page. I love history, love studying.

MS. LAWSON: [Laughs] Mhmm. If you're going to be delivered from anything, it's going to take education. It's going to take teaching to fix it.

HILARY: Well, yeah, I've been saying, I tell my family this all the time, another soapbox, it's the apathy of this generation, and like, they just read articles online about dating, they don't read books or good literature or I mean, history. They don't care. It's just sad.

MS. LAWSON: This to me, what you're talking about, this is scary. This is a scary period. You know, even if you weren't thinking about racism and stuff, it's just a time where people haven't got any faith. You've got to be concerned about young people. We've got to be concerned about young people, because they're going through something that nobody ever heard before. Like you said, they don't believe it until they try. And it's scary. They know more than...really, it's just more available to them. They take no pride in trying to learn it or trying to do it.

HILARY: Especially college campuses.

MS. LAWSON: They don't want...I look at those kids at the University and think "Lord, help them." I'm just praying, Lord, you know... And if you don't do anything else, just pray for the young people. They don't know what to do. [Laughs] I say, y'all don't know what to do. You know? And it's so high risk. It's high risk on the campus now. My granddaughter goes there.

HILARY: She goes to Alabama? Okay!

MS. LAWSON: Yeah, yeah she does. At UA.

HILARY: What year is she?

MS. LAWSON: This is her second year. She plays in the band.

HILARY: Okay, awesome.

MS. LAWSON: You know, I'm praying for her, but it's not about her. It's about the young people. Because it's like, somebody got to pray for you all. It's almost like this group, the UA group, got to pray for them more than the elementary.

HILARY: I have a brother who's sixteen, and a brother who's almost six. And the brother who's sixteen like, he's smart, he cares about school, but there's so many people in his grade...I mean me and my mom just talk about it all the time, all they care about is social media, you know, dressing to impress, they don't care about school, they don't care about ACTs, getting into college. And when you have a whole generation of uneducated people, history's going to repeat itself. And that's not always a good thing.

MS. LAWSON: Unless we do something and catch the young people, it's going to be bad. It's going to be worse in a way. It's going to be worse. You turn a group of uneducated people out there to lead you, you got trouble on your hands.

HILARY: And a lot of times I think that's what bigotry stems from, is not being educated.

MS. LAWSON: Lack of knowledge.

HILARY: And this class has been probably the thing that has taught me the most, even though we don't have tests, we write papers. It's just gotten me to get out in the community and talk to people that I wouldn't. I got to talk to Reverend Linton, I got to talk to you. It's just very...I don't know, it's these types of classes and sustained dialogue, to me, that make a difference. And if people are not invested in their classes, then they don't actually go out...

MS. LAWSON: Well you know, you're a different kind of person. You pick up wisdom from him, you pick up things that aren't not in the book [pounds book]. And some people are going to overlook that. But the wisdom that you pick up, you'll be able to use it. I didn't, I didn't say something to her, I didn't think about that. But some people aren't reading the book. They're going to be messed up, so. We got to do something, in my opinion. Just keep the process going, that we can retouch lives. Because that's what the whole journey's about, touching lives.

HILARY: And another thing is a lot of people on college campuses recently, if they don't...if it's something that they don't agree with, they don't even want to hear it or read it or listen to it or anything, and it's...

MS. LAWSON: You don't even talk about that.

HILARY: Yeah and actually Obama made a speech on that the other day, and it was very very good. He said, I forgot what his exact quote was, but it was, if someone comes to campus and you don't agree with them, you can argue them but don't silence them. I thought that was interesting. So many kids, they're just spoiled in a way, and I'm saying that as a kid so I can say it. [Laughs]

MS. LAWSON: Mhmm. It's okay to differ, but don't...

HILARY: Don't ignore someone's viewpoint, exactly.

MS. LAWSON: Respect it, respect the viewpoint of other people. Because all of us are different, but you've got to respect. Respect their experiences. You don't know what it was like for somebody else. So listen, listen, listen.

HILARY: Yes ma'am, and today's generation, they're never going to go through what happened in the '60s, so that's why we're trying to interview people, so we can understand.

MS. LAWSON: But what they go through may be worse. It's going to be equally as bad. You get out there, and you just don't have any skills. You don't have any skills. It's going to be a rough day coming up if we don't do something about it. If we don't catch it.

HILARY: Sometimes learning about our economy and stuff is just sad. Student debt and all that, it's depressing.

MS. LAWSON: It is. And we have fed stings and stuffing to our young people. They're in a dizzy with stuff. They don't even know what a budget is. [Laughs]

HILARY: Oh, I know. Or taxes, or...I'm a political science and history double major, so I'm good with budgets and that kind of thing, but a lot of people, they just don't -I have friends who just don't know the first thing about politics or.

MS. LAWSON: Or denial. "I don't have to have that kind of stuff. I can afford that." All they can afford is bring it on, just bring it on.

HILARY: Exactly me, see I think ahead. I've already started a stock account and retirement funds, not a lot of other kids think about that. And then they get out, and they're 30, and they're like, uh oh. [Laughs] Yes ma'am. Real world stuff.

MS. LAWSON: So it's a lot of learning that we have to give to help young people.

HILARY: Yes ma'am. I guess a last question would be, kind of the country as a whole, we've talked about Tuscaloosa, as a country as a whole how do you think race relations are doing, because they've talked a lot about race relations recently. On like the news and stuff, with things like the Eric Garner case. Or I don't know if you've followed any of those, Ferguson, that type of thing.

MS. LAWSON: Yeah, I've seen that. I didn't know it was that bad, really. It's almost across the board. In my opinion, it's almost across the board. You know you used to think that maybe it's just happening in the South. It was a different kind of slavery, this kind of stuff was different in the South. But right now the hate and stuff, it's almost across the board. And see, young people are doing some of everything in places that you wouldn't dream. They're doing these kinds of things. They're not going to school as they should, cutting class, and that's across the board. On college campuses. It's something that we need to pray about. The young people. Because it's going to be turned into their hands. It's going to be in your hand, and how you will do these things, how you will change things. And you're getting it right now. And if you don't get fed on this right now, ten years down the road you can't handle it.

HILARY: Yes ma'am. I'm very passionate about law enforcement training, and like making them live up to their own standards. Because a lot of times it goes back to the ignorance thing, the bigotry, stereotyping. It will lead them to accidentally pull a trigger.

MS. LAWSON: It will affect us, it will affect us.

HILARY: And it's awful, and I think that's one thing that needs to be changed across the board, for the United States.

MS. LAWSON: And you know, even when we look at the president, a highly intelligent man, but you know, there's so much coming at him right now. ISIS you know, how can you handle that? You don't know how to handle it, because it's been thrown at him so. This is something you didn't expect. Nobody expected this, I didn't.

HILARY: And if you're going to criticize him, criticize him for his policies, that's what makes me mad. There's stuff about him that I love, there's stuff about him that I don't love but I would never - like Hillary Clinton, I would never criticize her for her gender. There's stuff about her I like.

MS. LAWSON: And you got stuff you wonder about her.

HILARY: Exactly. [Laughs] Like, where were you at this time? There's stuff about her that worries me. There's been stuff Obama has signed into law that I'm not crazy about, there's been like, that speech that he gave that I'm like, yes you are awesome. It's just people I think, they grow up, and then they're stuck in their ways. And it takes education to change that.

MS. LAWSON: Mhmm, that's the only thing that's going to change it. See, we're all on the same page with education. And that's how we all have to get here with education. Other than that, we can't. We can come to you know, some conclusions. We can make progress, if we're all on the same page. But until then, we can't do it. There will be too much division.

HILARY: Yes ma'am, and educated people, they teach their kids, and it just is a thing that changes over time. And that's how it's got to be, because like you said, they can try to fix stuff at a federal level, but there's only so much you can do.

MS. LAWSON: And you see, it's changing all the time too. You know, I had it down pat, I had it, and then just... [Laughs]

HILARY: It's so complicated, way too big.

MS. LAWSON: You know a philosopher said that the world is in a state of flux, constantly changing. It's moving on us. So we have to take that into consideration. But we just got to be prepared, we still got to prepare for it. Yeah it's going to be changing, because young people, they're changing all the time, until they're playing hopscotch on loop. [laughs]

HILARY: And not caring about politics, that's one thing I guess I'm political science, they don't care

MS. LAWSON: They could care less about it

HILARY: They just say who they're like, like if their parents are Republicans they're just going to hate Obama. If their parents are Democrats they're just going to hate Romney and they don't look into their stances and see what they agree with themselves, exactly

MS. LAWSON: How can they fix it? What can fix it?

HILARY: And that's a major thing education can change, because that's picking what laws you're going to have enacted and how your government is going to work, so...I feel like we are definitely in agreement on the education thing.

MS. LAWSON: Yeah, we're good. [Laughs] Oh dear.

HILARY: Yes ma'am. But I think that's about it. Thank you so much for talking with me, I'm sorry that it took so long to get it all figured out.

MS. LAWSON: You all had schedules, I had a schedule, and it was just

HILARY: Absolutely, well I'm glad it worked out even if I was the only person who got to come, I enjoyed getting to talk to you

MS. LAWSON: I didn't want to miss the, he told me Thursday, but I was afraid if we didn't get it over with, it's going to get worse, because it's Christmas time

HILARY: And next week is finals week for us, so this is perfect.

MS. LAWSON: If we don't get it, it's going to get worse.

HILARY: Yes ma'am, well thank you so much for talking with me.