From Immigrant to Ethnic: Interview with Prudence Hawkins by Joseph Conforti

Prudence Hawkins

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Family from Florida. Grandfather was probably slave for Powell family. Mother raised on tobacco farm and her mother died when she was 12. She moved to Apalachicola, Florida—very small town.

Mother had 7 children, 4 girls, 3 boys.

Father had his own boat—fished in Gulf of Mexico, took fishing parties up river.

Very pleasant childhood, strict upbringing, church attendance required.

Mother raised the family, father supported the family. Mother raised garden and sold produce, sewed, made all their clothes. She didn't feel poor or lacking in anything.

Few blacks in white neighborhood but her family lived in a black neighborhood where everybody owned their homes.

Everyone friendly, nice community to live in.

She got married at 16 and they moved to Miami—neither had any skills.

When they married her husband was making $16. a week working in a sawmill. They did domestic work in Miami, were part of a staff of 7.

She was waitress for the family—had to learn everything about formal table settings, bought etiquette book.

Husband was chauffeur. Stayed 3 years and had small house nearby.
Prudence Hawkins

99 She had good social life. Had summers free while family was in Connecticut. They joined clubs in Miami.

111 Contrast between domestic worker in North and in South. In North she wasn't as respected by blacks because she did domestic work.

138 Worked for another family who spent summers in Illinois and they went also, worked for them about 3 years.

147 When they went back to Florida, got job with family from Providence. Stayed for 20 years, built their own home and left that job.

183 She saw her family often, they were close. Went home at least every other year.

199 All in Florida except herself. One brother is a college teacher, another worked for government. Sisters married, housewives.

213 Wasn't difficult for her to move from Florida--she liked to travel.

232 Impressed with family she worked for in Providence. To Edgartown every summer with family--mutual respect.

275 Differences between North and South--she had no real problems adjusting. Just as much stereotyping in North as in South.

300 Lived above family she worked for and was very happy in her work.

378 Church not very important to her here. Went to church infrequently because of her work.

396 Friendship--met others who did same kind of work, met some at church, some at parties.

415 She felt there was nowhere to go and nothing to do in Providence after coming from Miami.

440 She had only a few friends who were domestics.

480 Joined Urban League and NAACP when she came here. Now she's a member of Urban League guild--they raise money for scholarships. Both groups were working for the betterment of the black community.
Prudence Hawkins

Tape 1  Side 2

3 She was also involved in John Hope center, neighborhood recreation for children, for elderly, collected clothing for sales.

21 Groups gave her a sense of belonging to the community--she felt she was able to help others in that way.

33 Women's Intergroup Committee, an inter-racial group she was active in after World War II. Had demonstration at State House in 1950's, lobbied for fair housing bill. Group disbanded eventually.

69 She thinks everyone is prejudiced to some extent. Being raised in South has made her cautious, often she will just listen rather than give her views.

102 Her employer was unaware of her fair housing activities.

111 From the beginning, her goal was to have her own home and give her son as many advantages as possible--best schools were in New England.

122 Her son was good student but couldn't get into Brown. She feels it was because they were domestics. He attended PC and URI.

149 Began to look for lots to build home--had some difficulties because they were black. One white friend offered to buy a lot for them. They decided not to get into a neighborhood that way.

166 Started looking in black neighborhoods, bought lot, built.

179 Are happy in that section, have lived there 20 years.

187 Moved into new home and both quit jobs as domestics. Husband worked at RISD and she stayed at home.

216 She only belongs to Urban League now, tired of many clubs.

233 Still sees her family quite often.

256 Feels her parents were fairly cultured and that rubbed off on her as did some of the tastes of her former employers.

274 All she wants now is comfort and good health.

306 She feels progress has been made in opportunities available for blacks. Her son is a mechanical engineer for Polaroid. She sees him as an example of more opportunities for blacks.

337 She came from Florida when her son was 9 and she thinks he's done well. She's happy with her life here.