

**Rosemary Persip**  
**0:00:00 to 49:04**

**Housatonic Heritage Oral History**

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[talking about photograph or chart?]

**Interviewer:** Back to John Persip and Molly Odell.

**Rosemary Persip:** Then, see, there's another [0:00:42]. We haven't figured out who they are yet.

0:01:00

I don't know if you can make anything out of this or not.

**Interviewer:** Yes, I'm familiar with these.

**Rosemary Persip:** Yeah, who the men married, who the women married, whatever. Probably up until—see, Uncle Charlie didn't get married. That's this one. And May is Uncle George's wife, I mean Uncle Earl. So, that's this one. I don't understand that. But here he's done that. What I was talking about. The flags. Isaac?

0:02:00

**Interviewer:** Oh, that's OK. I can make sense of these, mostly because...

**Rosemary Persip:** Some of these are the same, that's why I was wondering—because when he showed me this before, I put two together and made one. And I was asking him which is which. This is marked 3, is that marked, up in the corner?

**Interviewer:** This is 1.

**Rosemary Persip:** OK, where's 2? Here's 2. Here's 3.

0:03:00

0:03:30

**Interviewer:** What do you know about the Portuguese ancestry? What can you tell me, based on family stories?

**Rosemary Persip:** There were two brothers that came here. They landed in Cummington. One stayed here, one went out west. And that's all we ever knew, they never were able to find the other one, that went out west. They didn't know where he went.

Rosemary Persip

**Interviewer:**

And what about the story of John Persip stowing away on a ship?

0:04:00

**Rosemary Persip:**

No, no one in the family ever remembers hearing that. So, I think somebody might have made it up. Because my father used to get quite angry when he would hear people say that. He'd say, "they did not." I mean, if there were two of them, why doesn't it say the two of them did. Anyway, he said they didn't.

Now, how they got here, I don't know. I don't know if anybody talked about it that much so that they would have even have known. It's too bad really. But the funny part about it is, is that anyone that is Portuguese, when you say the name right away they say, "oh, you're Portuguese." Because my daughter lives in California, she took my father to [medical person? 0:04:49] down there. And they saw the gardener, and they got to talking, and one thing after the other. So, he asked my father, who was he. He asked my daughter, who was she.

0:05:01

He told him, and he said, "oh," and he tried to speak Portuguese. No. They didn't learn it. And there were some people right here in Pittsfield that were very close friends to my father and my brother and all, and they were from Portugal, and they recognized the name. I think I told you they said we didn't say it right. Then, of course, the worst part of it is, is there are two or three spellings. So it's hard to determine which is which. Of course, not having ever been there, I don't know the difference. No one has ever said what the difference is. So, I don't know.

**Interviewer:**

You mentioned too that your family has a tendency to identify more with the Portuguese ancestry, versus the African-American. Can you maybe expound on that a little more?

**Rosemary Persip:**

Uh, not really. [laugh] Except for what it is.

0:06:00

Actually, no one ever said anything one way or the other. Except when we were growing up, I was always told we were Portuguese, Indian, and Dutch. The Dutch is on my mother's side. The Indian was on both sides. And we never made distinctions of one way or the other.

We grew up in a neighborhood that had Italian, Polish, French. We all played together. We all went around together. Slept at each other's house overnight. Had fights with each other. Mrs. Brokowski used to say to my mother, "we won't bother them,

because they'll be friends, and if we fight, we won't." That's what it used to be. Of course, they always taught us wrong words. Which, when we got older, we sort of forgot what they were. But, we never made any distinction one way or the other.

0:07:00

And then, this is something my husband doesn't like me to say, but it's true, my father used to say, "everything was alright, no one cared who you were, until they came." They, meaning when the black people moved up from the south during the war.  
[0:07:18]

**Interviewer:**

Well, you're going to tell me.

**Rosemary Persip:**

Well, it's not that bad. But they were picketing Woolworth's—I don't know if you've ever heard that story, about how they wouldn't serve them down south, in the counter at Woolworth's. And so the NAACP suggested they picket the store.

**Interviewer:**

In Pittsfield, right?

**Rosemary Persip:**

In Pittsfield, and any place else that would go along with it. Well, there was something I wanted at Woolworth's, and I didn't think one way or the other. I knew I wanted to get in there. I walked in there. When I came out, they were calling me all kinds of names.

0:07:56

I could have cared less, what was happening down south. Maybe I shouldn't say that. But, I mean, that was their problem, not mine. I knew what I wanted. It's always been that way, as far as the NAACP goes. My father joined it. He was in it for a while, and he got out, because he said it was [0:08:13] trouble. And he didn't agree with him.

Then, when they started [0:08:21] my daughter and [0:08:25] from South Carolina and Jessie Jackson was one of her favorites, is. And I said to her, "[0:08:35] I don't like Jessie Jackson." And she got mad at me, she said, "why?" I said, "because he doesn't talk, he screams." And I noticed [0:08:42], people in his position scream, they don't talk. They start preaching and their voice goes up, up, up, and they're screaming. And he is the one that started the black and then African-American.

0:09:00

When he did, we all decided we didn't like either one of those names. Of course, when we were growing up, we were colored. They didn't care what you were actually right here in Pittsfield. Like I said, we played with everybody when school...

**Interviewer:**

There wasn't much of a colored or black population here though, was there?

Rosemary Persip

**Rosemary Persip:**

There were the Persips, Hamiltons, and Hooses. The Moreheads. The Gunns were in Stockbridge. This is when I was growing up. But before that, there were just the Persips, Hamiltons, Hooses. And Casears [sp]. I forgot the Casears [sp]. They were in Dalton. There must have been someone to [marry? 0:09:41] and I, because they weren't that many. I mean, in school there was never any, "who are you?", or "what you are?", or whatever. As far as Pittsfield itself goes, there was some slight discrimination, but it was hidden, more or less.

0:10:00

They didn't come right out and say things. And it was only one or two places where—in fact, there was a restaurant on [0:10:06] Street. We went in there once. We knew the lady wasn't going to wait on us. It wasn't the owners, it was this one particular woman. So we sat at her table. And she walked [0:10:18], she brought us water and put it down and, "I'll be back for you order." Well, after about 10, 15 minutes, and the place wasn't that crowded—my cousin knew how to top up the glass of water without spilling it. So she did that for all four of our glasses of water. And we got up and walked out.

So, I mean, it was that type of just one or two. But we found out later, the lady got fired, because the owner didn't like the way she was discriminating. Even my brother said, when he was growing up, we never ran into any of that. Once in a while, somebody might say something [0:10:58]. That was just that one person.

0:11:00

[0:11:01-0:11:08] My cousin said, we don't look like him. I mean, exactly what do they look like? Well, one thing, they're all darker. [0:11:25] And their features are different. More distinct, I guess. Now I'm sounding like I'm discriminating. Anyway, that's what it is.

**Interviewer:**

But there's an obvious physical difference.

**Rosemary Persip:**

Yeah, right. Whenever we wanted to do anything, we just did it. And then, when the people started coming up here, that's when all the discrimination started, and this, that, and the other. It was them. Not the people that were here.

0:11:58

That started talking about, "they won't hire me, [0:12:02], they'll hire you because you're a Persip." No, they hired you because you were qualified. Not because of your—there had been stories—I don't know if you know Wilbert Stockton or have heard of him. He used to be a councilman here in Pittsfield. He's still living in Pittsfield. Anyway. Somebody complained to him that they wouldn't hire them in some business, I don't know which one it was. So, he thought he

would be nice and go see what the problem was. He looked at the girl's application, he couldn't even read it. She didn't fill it in the way it was supposed to have been filled in. She was definitely not qualified. But she was using her color as the reason for not being hired. You don't do things like that. You want something, you're qualified.

I was going to go to nurse training, and I went to BMC, it's Pittsfield General then. Went to Pittsfield General [0:12:58] training.

0:13:00

And we got a call from the nurse that was the head of nurses at the time, and she said that they would have to take a poll amongst the parents. The girls didn't mind if we went in training with them, but they had to see what the parents said. That riled me up. My father went for a [0:13:20] at the time. He had a lot to do with it. He went up, and that's how we found out about that situation.

Then, I went to St. Luke's. I called up and made an appointment. When I walked in the first day, the nun says is, "why didn't you come to us first?" They didn't say what color we were or anything. So that's where we went. The only thing I don't like nowadays, it's always the first African-American. They don't say the first Italian, the first French. Why do they have to say that?

0:14:00

I mean, it's just the way things are. I guess [0:14:04]. And she says, "well, don't feel bad, because they say she's the first woman." Or, "she is a woman." When they say stuff. She said, but I have to get over it. But, I don't feel like you should have to get over it, I think they should get over it. I went to the mayor, when Stephanie was here, Stephanie Wilson. I'm listening to the radio, and he's talking—because I was with [0:14:40] that day, so I didn't really get to see her until she came to the reception at the Colonial. And when they had all the stuff at city hall, when the mayor spoke, and all that stuff. I was listening to it later on the radio, and he says something about she was a credit to her race. [0:14:57]

0:14:59

The next time I saw the mayor, I said, "I got to speak to you a minute, please." He says, "now what?" I'm always telling him something. And so, I said, "I'm not offended, or I'm not insulted, but," I said, "I have to tell you something you should never do again. Don't you ever say a person is a credit to their race. They're a credit to themselves. They wanted to achieve whatever it was they achieved, and they worked for it. The race didn't work for it."

And this is a hangover from my father. When Joe Louis was boxing, and they used to come on, and they'd say, "he's a credit to his race, he won another fight." [0:15:39] "He is not. He's the one that fought. He's a credit to himself." This is a hangover...but it's true.

**Interviewer:** That makes a lot of sense.

**Rosemary Persip:** It is true. So the mayor says, "I said that?" I said, "well, in so many words you did, yes." He says, "I won't do it again." I said, "that's good."

0:15:59 And then, another thing that irritated me and my sister, why did they have to have a black minister open up the program, a black choir sing from the black church, and the step dancers. If it was an Italian person, or Polish person, they wouldn't have done that. They wouldn't have had all Polish people or whatever. That's discrimination. It's subtle, but it's discrimination. In my opinion. And my cousins feel the same way.

Well, after you had been to see Ellen, Ellen went to my cousins, and she said, "Francis, do you consider yourself African-American?" "No way." She went to Mildred, "do you consider yourself African-American?" "Nope." So, it's just going down through the generations. They're people.

**Interviewer:** Oh, absolutely.

**Rosemary Persip:** It's just the way it is, I guess.

0:17:00 But, it's one of those things. Just like I belong to a whole bunch of things. But I went to a meeting at the Pittsfield Area Council of Churches, and the new president came in, and he said, "good morning." I said, "good morning." Then he said, "you're from Second Congregational Church?" And I said, "no, First Baptist." Then he went, "oh."

I take after my mother. I looked at him, and I said, "why is it just because you have brown skin you have to be a member of the Second Congregational Church?" "I'm sorry, I didn't mean anything by it." But he never said it again. I know he didn't, but it's just the fact that he automatically looked at me and thought that I represented the—I said, "no, I represent the First Baptist Church and Church [0:17:53] United." I represented Church [] United for I don't know how many years at that council of churches.

0:18:00 But, it's just the way it goes.

Rosemary Persip

**Interviewer:** The other generations, are they associated with the Baptist Church as well?

**Rosemary Persip:** Yeah. When the church was built, when it was on North Street, my grandparents were members of it. So they've always been. In fact, we would go again, but there weren't that many other people around here. They were the only ones that went to that church. People of color. They were the only ones.

When they built the church on South Street, when they were leaving the one on North Street, my grandmother and my aunt had signed a quilt. The women's club made a quilt, and for ten cents they'd embroider your name on it, and they'd put that money towards the church. Then they sold bricks.

0:19:00 There's a picture of the church, and it shows all these bricks with numbers, and then corresponding to the numbers, down below the picture, are the names. My grandmother's name on that.

**Interviewer:** Your grandmother being?

**Rosemary Persip:** Alice.

**Interviewer:** Alice Hamilton?

**Rosemary Persip:** Yeah. So we've always gone there. Our mother was Episcopal. She was born in Connecticut, South Norwalk. She went to the Episcopal Church. She had a membership there for years and years and years. Then somebody talked to her into going Second Congregational. She didn't particularly like that, so she went back to Episcopal. Then she'd come to church with us, when we got baptized. Mother, she'd come to church with us, and then about, maybe 20 years or so before she died, she joined the Baptist Church. When she was always an Episcopal.

0:20:00 Well, my cousin Francis will tell you, they went for work. They got out of school, they went to work. My mother, and my Aunt May, insisted on educating their children. So if somebody said, "why don't you kids quit school and go to work," that was bad, very bad. And so they went to work, we all got educated. Only two in Uncle Johnny's family graduated from high school. He had quite a few [0:20:33]. There was just that much difference.

When we were growing up, even they, that didn't go to high school, were considered snobs. Because we didn't do what the black kids in Pittsfield did. They used to laugh at my brother, because he used to go to Tanglewood all the time.

Rosemary Persip

0:20:58

He used to take the concerts and symphonies. Through high school, they used to have them there. They had a beautiful auditorium, even back then. But anyhow. They used to have things like that. We would do things like that. Just a whole different perspective from what the other kids did. [0:21:20] We were always called the kids on the hill, by the other kids.

**Interviewer:** Black kids?

**Rosemary Persip:** Yes. Because—I mean, we were friends with them. We'd go to parties with them, and stuff like that. But if we would say, "there's going to be a concert, you want to go to the concert?" "Are you kidding?" They just didn't like the same things. So, I guess you might say, we were discriminated against growing up, by the—

**Interviewer:** Interesting.

**Rosemary Persip:** —kids. So when they started this—Mrs. [0:21:56], when she started that [0:22:00] about asking us?

0:22:02

But there again, it's like—a man came to church a couple of weeks ago to talk about the Indians in Stockbridge. Well, naturally, because he talked about them, he had to cover all this area too. [0:22:22] Previous to his speaking, I said something to him about, my father said we were Mohicans, with a C. His grandmother was a full-blooded Indian. He said, "well, that's a possibility."

**Interviewer:** His grandmother being?

**Rosemary Persip:** My father's grandmother.

**Interviewer:** What's her name?

**Rosemary Persip:** I don't know.

**Interviewer:** Oh, OK.

**Rosemary Persip:** I don't know what her name was.

**Interviewer:** OK, go ahead.

**Rosemary Persip:** It had to be one of the Johns I guess.

0:22:59

Anyway, this man from Stockbridge—he looked at me, and I said, "just because I have brown skin, doesn't mean I couldn't be of Indian blood." He started laughing, he said, "no." Because he'd met Indians that were very black. And I did too. I went on



a Mohawk tour, I was shocked. I really was. I didn't know the Indians were that black. They were.

He told me they were from the west. The real black ones. Now that is what I would call—Black-American, African-American. I have cousins that are real light. And my brother had a friend, he looked at my cousin, says, “how can you call her black? She's white as I am.” He was white, he was Swedish. I don't know. I don't know why they have to label everybody anyhow. It doesn't make sense to me.

0:24:00

I mean, I know the census has to have so many for this, and so many for that. And if you want a grant, you got to have so many of this [0:24:07]. Like they used to say, the token black, because you had to have at least five or six, if you were going to get recognition for different things and all that stuff.

I think the whole thing boils down to the fact that if you had brown skin, no matter what color brown it is, you're automatically put in that category. And, like I said, we have the right to say that we're not in that category. We were not. And if people don't agree with us, we don't care. That's how that goes.

I often wished my father had talked more about the family, and Uncle Charlie. They were out here, naturally before Uncle Charlie died, not after.

0:25:00

They were out here, and they were discussing the family. We kept asking questions, but we never got back far enough, because the more present they got to talking about was so interesting, you just kept asking questions about them. And then you would go back a little bit farther, and they'd answer, but we never got to the very beginning.

So, I don't know how you could do that. Now, this man in Stockbridge said—oh dear, I can't think of his name, the Indian, storyteller. He's going to one day start doing Indian heritage research. He's going to call me. Because he thinks we might be able to make a connection somewhere along the line. The man of Stockbridge said, if I don't learn anything from them, to call him, because he knows an Indian in New York that is looking into heritages, and she might be able to find something.

0:26:02

Of course, my husband's got Indian on his side. [0:26:07] when the Indians were here. [0:26:10] with Indians anyway.

**Interviewer:**

The other families you mentioned that were here at the same time as the Persips, the Hamiltons—

**Rosemary Persip:**

The Hamiltons, the Hooses. The Caesars.

Rosemary Persip

**Interviewer:**

Were they black or African-American, or were they...?

**Rosemary Persip:**

The Caesars were. Well, what they call now, they were black, yeah. And they were all fair-skinned too. In comparison to the others. And they were Indian. A lot of Indian in Mr. Caesar. When you looked at pictures of Indians, you would look at him. There was really a lot of Indian in him. But, I don't know too much about the Hooses. I really don't. They lived in Dalton, I can tell you that much.

0:27:03

In fact, my husband was just talking to—we went to a party, for the Mr. [0:27:10], and he was talking to my husband about the [0:27:25] house that the Hooses lived in. They're trying to make it historical. And that's in Dalton. But, they have to wait a whole year, because they couldn't find any people that were survivors of the family. Which is kind of strange. And they had to wait a whole year, they said, before they could take it over, while they were looking for people. Because they might come in to say, "hey, that's my house." Whatever. Similar to the project they're doing about the Harris house. In Pittsfield. Harrisons. Anyhow.

**Interviewer:**

That Hamilton is part of your family, right, the Hamiltons?

0:28:01

**Rosemary Persip:**

Yeah. They used to live—well, my father always talked about his father walk...hitch down to Southwalk [?] Road, to court my grandmother. So, they lived on Southwalk [?] Road. I don't know about the rest of them. That was [0:28:19-0:28:24]. They were sisters of Alice. I don't know if she had brothers or not. Wait a minute, she did, I think, have one brother, that I know of. You have ever heard of Charles Hamilton, the basketball player, he became a teacher? That was his grandfather, yeah, his grandfather.

**Interviewer:**

I read somewhere that one of the Hamiltons fought in the Civil War, you know about that?

0:28:57

**Rosemary Persip:**

Yeah. I think that was my grandmother's, either her grandfather or somebody. Because my father had a book about Civil—I wish I knew what happened to that book. He had all the names of all the people that fought in the Civil War from around this area, and he prized that book. I don't know what happened to it. And he used to say, that was his great-grandfather or something like that.

Rosemary Persip

**Interviewer:** Because the reference I read said that he fought in the 54<sup>th</sup> black regiment for Massachusetts, but I haven't been able to find...

**Rosemary Persip:** You know, I don't know. I heard that myself, but I never, going back there, seen anything back that far to say that he actually did. I don't know.

**Interviewer:** It was the Hamilton family you said were Dutch, right?

**Rosemary Persip:** No, my mother's family. Prices.

0:30:00

**Interviewer:** Oh, I'm sorry.

**Rosemary Persip:** Uncle Johnny married the Grants...

0:30:09-0:30:43

[*sound cuts out*]

...she found a whole bunch of pictures, and she brought them over to my cousins, and he was there one day. He said, "give me those." He took them. He took pictures of them, and put them on tape, VHS.

0:30:56

We were out here showing it one day, and my great grandson came in. He's looking and, "who are those people?" We said, "those are our aunts, uncles, and cousins." [0:31:10] He kept looking, "they're white." I said, "well, that's the way they look." What else could I say? I didn't know. And of course, he's mixed. He's a mulatto. This is my grandson.

This is what gets me. He's got two kids, a boy and a girl. Both of their mothers are white. Neither one of them wanted to get married, when they found out they were pregnant, they didn't want to get married. So, they didn't. But, he's got the kids every other weekend. And whenever the mothers don't want to bother with [0:31:55]. But anyway, they're cute kids.

0:32:00

But, this is what they saw when they looked at their pictures. He was 12 at the time. He's 16 now, but he was 12. He kept looking at them, "they look white." I don't know what to say to that. Really don't. I tried to find it, because I was going to show it to you, and I can't find it. But if I ever come across it, I'll call you sometime.

**Interviewer:** In the research that I did on the Portuguese history, there was a lot of inter-mixing with black slaves and stuff...

**Rosemary Persip:** My daughter says that the Portuguese had slaves. So did the Chinese. So did some of the other—and so, I don't know if they

Rosemary Persip

were, I don't know which part they were. If they were the owners or the slaves. I don't know.

0:33:00

I haven't been able to get that far back. But, as far as it goes, my brother and I [0:33:08-0:33:18]. It's hard to say. If you want to go by color, it's hard to say.

**Interviewer:**

It looks like you have a good tan, looks like you've been in the sun. I mean, I never would have...

**Rosemary Persip:**

No, as my husband used to say, I wasn't [0:33:37]. He still does. Now just what he means, I have to make my own conclusions. But my daughter's real light. My son is light too. Not quite as dark. What do you expect, mix them all up.

0:34:03

But it's hard to say really. And it's not that you're trying to be something that you're not.

**Interviewer:**

No.

**Rosemary Persip:**

Actually, it boils down to the fact that you're trying to find out who you really are.

**Interviewer:**

I think too, in this area especially, Berkshire County, or just the north in general, such a predominately white community for so long. And the African-American [0:34:30], that black history has been basically ignored, and so they're trying to bring it up. And there's a certain amount of pride. So, it seems like a lot of people are starting to—and not just blacks.

0:34:57

I've read of other people focusing on the Polish community, or certain communities that if you weren't white, your history wasn't considered as important.

**Rosemary Persip:**

Because when he started working on the archives, and even now a couple weeks ago, they called him up and asked him if he could come down. Because one of the schools, their kids would go [0:35:19]. Now, he said the same thing. It's hard to find proof they are, because so many of the kids nowadays don't have a father. Or they don't know who their father is. If they do know, then it's easier. But a lot of the kids don't know who their father is. And he said it's very difficult to look up ancestry.

**Interviewer:**

It's difficult too, just the intermixing of races and war, there's not just one...

**Rosemary Persip:**

It's hard. But he's been working down there for a long time. I can't remember how long.

Rosemary Persip

0:36:00 He was born [0:36:03]. His father was [0:36:06]. His mother was [0:36:09-0:36:16]. He came here, of course [0:36:20]. I'm not thinking about it. He is, because [had to battle? 0:36:29]. For the longest time, [0:36:34-0:36:44]. He knew he would be accepted. He joined the country club. Then he started going to church. Started doing this, that, and the other. Now he's telling me, as he says, the Chinese, in the group, it became used to it.

0:37:00 This is what you do, if you want to do anything with any type of education. Sure, there are a lot of people here now, that have good education, and they do [0:37:10-0:37:18].

But really, they're not native to the area. And that's another thing. I understand that Indians are beginning to trying to decide should they be Native-Americans or Americans—American-Indian or Native-Americans, that's what it is. So, I don't know how they're going to end up with that, it'll be interesting. See, all of this comes from one person saying, "we should do such, such, such." [0:37:48-0:37:50] I had a letter the other day from Women of Color. I joined it when they first started. I did not join it last year.

0:38:01 I got a letter the other day saying, could I please send in my dues. If I had already sent it, [0:38:07] the letter. And then it lists a bunch of things they want to do. And this is why [0:38:12] getting out, and this is why I didn't join last year. And I'm not going to join this year, and I put it right in the note saying so. And they will call me a snob again, and I don't care.

One of their things, they're saying, is collecting toys for children. And in parenthesis, African-American only. I don't agree with that. What's the next line say? They're going to KB to ask them to contribute toys. So if they're so hip on just giving them to the colored kids, why do they go to the white business company to ask them for toys. That's not right. That is definitely not right.

0:38:57 That's as bad as years ago, over at Amherst, at the college. A whole bunch of black kids got together, they wanted their own dormitory. And the first thing came to my mind is, that's self-discrimination. Why would they want their own dormitory. That's stupid. So, they do things to themselves. So, now you know why everyone...

**Interviewer:** So, you're comfortable with the classification of color, in general? Just because it's any color, not just African-American.

**Rosemary Persip:** Yeah. Eleanor spoke about that so many times.

Rosemary Persip

**Interviewer:**

I mean, if you had to pick a category.

**Rosemary Persip:**

We say, if you say people of color, it doesn't mean what you are. You can be Indian, Chinese, Korean, anything you want. Even East-Indians. Some of them are browner than we are. I worked at the hospital and some of them came.

0:40:01

The doctors. And they looked at me, and I go, "oh." They were browner than I am. But yet, they did not say they were colored. Or people of color. Because they can speak a funny language.

My mother could go anywhere she wanted to, and no one would know what she was, one way or the other. In fact, there was a fruit stand on Tyler Street, and it was run by a Lebanese, and they thought she was one of them.

I took her out there one day. She gets out the car and she's looking around. A man comes up, starts talking to her. She looked at him, she said, "I'm sorry, I don't understand you." "You're not Lebanese?" She said no.

So, it's just one of these things. But Eleanor and I agree, we'll go along with people of color. My brother said he'd go along with that. The whole thing is, neither one of us like the distinction. Either you are, or you're not, or you're in-between.

0:41:01

Of course, you get a lot of people that years ago, they used to talk about passing. I don't know if you ever heard that. People that were real white, but they were supposedly African-American, colored, whatever you want to call it. If they were real white, they would go different places, and they'd pretend that they were white. And that's what they used to say, you were passing. Because no one would say anything.

My mother had a friend of hers—she told me this, her friend went down south. She was from the south, but she had moved up here. She did everything with a white [0:41:41]. She was passing. And nobody said anything. My mother used to say, she went down south, she's come back to blacks.

I could have done that. When we got married, '47, he had one year to finish at Tuskegee. So, I went back with him.

0:42:05

And the girl next door—we lived in what used to be the soldiers barracks. They converted them, so that the married students would have an apartment. And the girl next door, her father was a janitor at the school, and we became quite good friends.

One day she took me downtown, went to one of the five and dimes, and I picked up something I wanted. I brought it over to

the counter. This white lady walked up. I put my stuff down, and went over to her, and I said, "I was here first."

The girl that took me downtown, she walked away from me. And I didn't know, I thought she's gone to look at something else. OK. Then, anyway, the lady waited on the other woman, and then she came back and finished waiting on me.

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We're leaving the store, and I said, "boy, it's hot." And I saw the water fountain, and I went over, and I was drinking out of the fountain. She's pulling on me like crazy. And I raised my hand and said, "what are you doing?" And I saw the sign. I said, "I'm not poison, they won't die." And I finished drinking, and walked out.

She swore she'd never take me downtown again. Because I spoke up too much when I wasn't supposed to. How'd I supposed to know I wasn't supposed to—I did when I was here. If I was here, and I said, "I was here first," they would have dropped it, and waited on me, and then gone. So, it was just the way I was brought up.

**Interviewer:**

You were the next Rosa Parks.

**Rosemary Persip:**

Yeah. Right. That's what my mother used to say, that she'd come back to the blacks. Because she was kicked right out. But anyhow. That's the way that goes.

0:44:00

Did whatever we wanted to do, went wherever we wanted to go. No one thought of anything. [0:44:06] That's what all the talk about, because we were colored, they won't hire me because I am. And they still do that. "They won't hire me because I'm black." Are you qualified, what do you mean? Do you know what you're getting into, do you know how to do that job? Blah, blah, blah.

I got [0:44:32]. He's in San Jose, California. This is where—he worked with computers. Then they started downsizing, firing. Fancy name for laying off. OK. So, he went to work in Macy's at Christmas time. They liked what he did, they hired him. [0:44:53] He worked for about three months. They needed a manager of one of the—the men's department.

0:45:01

One day, he said he knows this woman. Well, actually, somebody said it to him. "That lady keeps watching you." And so, he didn't know who she was. So after the second or third day, he walked over to her and said, "was there something that I can help you with? I noticed you keep following me around the store."

She says yes, so she gave him a card. It was for a shoe company. [0:45:26] She said that a woman was working for them that had worked under him at Macy's. And she said, when they were looking for a manager of the shoe store, she recommended him. Because he was the best manager she had worked under.

Now, manager in a store like Macy's, and manager of a shoe store, are two different things. Because he had complete control of that. They had a big meeting—he's been with them for about a year or so now, a little over a year. They have big meetings every once in a while in San Francisco, whatever.

0:46:03

And he got a call there today, they had done a survey. The managers of all the different shoe stores in the area. They were not working the hours they were supposed to work. And they told him he needed to take time off, because he worked too many hours. Which was good, because he wants to come home for Christmas. So he asked them if he could come home for Christmas, they said yes. He'll take those days off, and his assistant manager will have to run the store.

But I said, "oh, that's weird." He said he never thought that he was putting in that many hours. He just went to work. Sometimes he did overtime and all. But, they didn't do overtime, but they also I guess did not do their 40 hour week either. So, I don't know. There again, you pat yourself on the back to say, well, that's the way you were brought up.

0:47:00

[*sound cuts out*]

**Interviewer:**

...Homestead and Hinsdale.

**Rosemary Persip:**

OK, Eleanor was left the property. When Car died, we went up there and the house used to be really nice. It really was. It was nice and clean. We had parties, and all that type of stuff up there. It was really nice. Then, let's see, Jessie died. Jessie was Car's sister. She died first. And then, because Eleanor was named after their mother, they deeded everything to her. And we had a heck of a time, because the other Persips wanted it, blah, blah, blah. But because it was just written, there was no legal anything. So we got the lawyer, and the lawyer said because it had been written and it was witnessed, it was legal. So, that's how come Eleanor got the property.

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In the meantime, people went up there, and they just took whatever they wanted. By the time Eleanor was able to get up there, just about anything of any value was gone. My father and Eleanor and I went up, and we just cleaned it all out.



Rosemary Persip

Then Eleanor—the camp wanted to buy it, and Eleanor sold them some of the property. She sold the property that was on the lake. And she sold property that was in town. Because she decided she didn't want to bother with it anymore. So there was three pieces of property she just got rid of. Everybody was mad at her about, because we wanted her to keep some of it, anyway. And at least the lake property. But she didn't. Of course, it was hers, so we couldn't say anything.

0:49:04

*[Recording ends]*