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Invisible Community Project
in partnership with
Housatonic Heritage Oral History

Rozena Rose
Recorded: April 27, 1998
0:00:00 to 1:00:50

Elaine Gunn: Elaine Gunn. Today's date is April 27th, 1998, and I'm at the home of Mrs. Rozena Mitchell Rose. And Mrs. Rose has kindly consented to be a part of our oral history project, a project that is part of the Invisible Community project. Thank you very much, Rozena, for this interview.

Rozena Rose: My pleasure.

Elaine Gunn: And I'm going to ask you to give me some information about your family background, such as who your parents were and where they were born. And if they weren't born in Massachusetts then why did they come to Massachusetts or why they came to Berkshire County in particular? Of course, if you have any information at all about your grandparents, please, we'd like to have that information also. So, I'll stop and let you just sort of talk about your parents and your grandparents, and where they came from and why they came here.

Rozena Rose: Making me think.

0:01:00 My mother, Iola Mitchell, was born in Brooksville, Mississippi. Excuse me. And my grandmother, her mother, was born in Brooksville, Mississippi. And my mother came to Pittsfield—oh, heavens—in 1947. Well, I graduated in '49, so she had to have been here '45, '44, something—'44, 1944. And she came to Pittsfield, and she worked at Foxhollow School, and they—she got to Pittsfield through—an ad in the paper, I think, was ran by the Crawfords in Great Barrington, and she got a job through their advertisement.

Elaine Gunn: Through Miss Crawford's—

Rozena Rose: Right.

Elaine Gunn: —employment agency.

Rozena Rose: Employment agency, that's correct.

0:02:01

And I remember her working at Foxhollow School, and then she sent for us because we stayed with my grandmother. My mother used to teach school in Dauphin, Alabama, and she worked in the summer, and in the winter, my grandmother took care of us. So, anyway, we came up here in 1946. I was about 16. I remember losing a shoe on the way up here—

Elaine Gunn: [laugh]

Rozena Rose: —because we stopped off to see my father. My mother was worried about where we were, and we stopped in Pennsylvania. And I called her [0:02:35] said you were a day late. Maybe she was [0:02:37 having?], you know. But, anyway, we came up here, and I went to school here in Pittsfield, Pittsfield High School. And I have two brothers. My other—my oldest brother was living with my father, and my youngest brother and I lived with my mother here in Pittsfield.

Elaine Gunn: What year did you graduate from Pittsfield High?

0:03:00

Rozena Rose: 1949.

Elaine Gunn: So, your mother came to Massachusetts really to work?

Rozena Rose: To work.

Elaine Gunn: OK. And then decided that you all of you should come to [0:03:13]—?

Rozena Rose: Well, the whole logic was to send for us.

Elaine Gunn: To send?

Rozena Rose: Right.

Elaine Gunn: And to set up housekeeping here—

Rozena Rose: Right.

Elaine Gunn: —in Pittsfield?

- Rozena Rose:** Right, because we were like—my grandmother during the winter months because my mother taught school, and she wanted to be with us.
- Elaine Gunn:** OK, good. Now, you mentioned your grandparents, your maternal grandparents. Your mother's parents—
- Rozena Rose:** My mother's parents.
- Elaine Gunn:** —were from Mississippi.
- Rozena Rose:** Right.
- Elaine Gunn:** OK. And your father's parents—?
- Rozena Rose:** Father's parents were from Birmingham.
- Elaine Gunn:** Oh, Birmingham [0:03:41]—
- Rozena Rose:** But that's what we came from, Birmingham, to Pittsfield. I was born—oh, I was born in Birmingham, Alabama.
- Elaine Gunn:** OK.
- Rozena Rose:** OK.
- Elaine Gunn:** All right.
- Rozena Rose:** But my mother was born in Brooksville, Mississippi. But I was born in Birmingham, Alabama. And my father's parents are from Birmingham, Alabama. And my mother was schooled, she graduated from college and so forth, in Birmingham.
- 0:04:03
- Elaine Gunn:** And they stayed in Mississippi, for the most part, except for your mother?
- Rozena Rose:** No, no, she was born in Mississippi.
- Elaine Gunn:** Oh, Mississippi.
- Rozena Rose:** But then they moved to Birmingham—
- Elaine Gunn:** Birmingham? Oh, I see.
- Rozena Rose:** —and when my mom was younger, and she went to school, and then she graduated from college. And then she taught

school in Dauphin, Alabama. But my father's people are all from Birmingham.

Elaine Gunn: Birmingham. Is your mother still living now?

Rozena Rose: No, my mother died in 1981.

Elaine Gunn: Here in Pittsfield?

Rozena Rose: In Pittsfield.

Elaine Gunn: Oh, Pittsfield?

Rozena Rose: Mmhmm.

Elaine Gunn: I don't remember ever meeting your mother.

Rozena Rose: You went to my h...you came to my house. Did you ever come to my house?

Elaine Gunn: No, I don't know. No, I don't remember. I just remember—

Rozena Rose: It was just the dances.

Elaine Gunn: —the dances and parties.

Rozena Rose: Because my mother used to go to the dances every once in a while, and watch us dance.

Elaine Gunn: OK. So, I probably did see her there. I just didn't know—

Rozena Rose: Yeah, but she's a very quiet little lady.

Elaine Gunn: OK. All right. OK. So, you mentioned that you were born then in Alabama.

Rozena Rose: Mmhmm.

Elaine Gunn: OK.

0:05:00 So, you've lived in Pittsfield since 1946.

Rozena Rose: '46.

Elaine Gunn: OK. And you mentioned about your mother having sent for you. And you said brothers and sisters.

Rozena Rose: Right.

Elaine Gunn: How many?

Rozena Rose: I have two brothers.

Elaine Gunn: Two brothers, and no sisters.

Rozena Rose: No sisters.

Elaine Gunn: OK. You must've been spoiled—

Rozena Rose: [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: —[laugh] a little bit.

Rozena Rose: Yes, a little bit—only to my family—

Elaine Gunn: Only to your family.

Rozena Rose: —not the outside. [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: Yeah. [laugh] So, your brothers' names are?

Rozena Rose: Edward Mitchell, Jr., and [0:05:26 Alfonso?] Mitchell. Edward is the oldest, I'm in the middle, and [0:05:30 Alfonso's?] the baby.

Elaine Gunn: Now, do they still live in Pittsfield?

Rozena Rose: No, Edward lives in Beltsville, Maryland. That's right outside of Silver Springs. And [0:05:38 Alfonso?] lives in Burlington, Vermont.

Elaine Gunn: How did he get to Burlington, Vermont?

Rozena Rose: Working at the GE—

Elaine Gunn: Oh.

Rozena Rose: —because Eddie used to live there too. He worked at the GE. So, that's how my baby brother got up there. But then you know how they would send you from one GE to another? He chose the—because of his children, he liked the environment in [0:06:00] Maryland, so.

0:06:03

Elaine Gunn: OK. But Burlington, Vermont, there're not a lot of us in Vermont anyhow.

Rozena Rose: No. But he wanted his kids to be exposed to Black people because they'd never had that. So, he moved to [0:06:14].

Elaine Gunn: Interesting. OK. So, some of your family then had left the area. You have a brother who was—

Rozena Rose: I don't have any family, me personally, just kids here.

Elaine Gunn: Yeah. But left the area. But your brother, your one brother who was in—

Rozena Rose: Oh, right, right, right.

Elaine Gunn: And then the other [0:06:28].

Rozena Rose: Right.

Elaine Gunn: Do you ever go to Burlington?

Rozena Rose: Well, do I have both of them?

Elaine Gunn: No, do you ever go up there? Did you go up there [0:06:35]?

Rozena Rose: No, I haven't been, but my kids have been up there. I haven't been up there yet. He usually comes and visits us.

Elaine Gunn: Good.

Rozena Rose: So, we were thinking about going up this summer because it's beautiful country.

Elaine Gunn: It's beautiful country.

Rozena Rose: It's beautiful. My kids love it.

Elaine Gunn: Oh, yeah. Oh, it's beautiful country.

Rozena Rose: They went up to visit him, and they went to the World's Fair. They had a chance to do that [0:06:52].

Elaine Gunn: Yeah. OK. Yeah, it's wonderful, beautiful country—not in the winter but in the summer.

0:07:00

Rozena Rose: [laugh]

- Elaine Gunn:** So, you mentioned that they left because one wanted to expose his children to—
- Rozena Rose:** He left Vermont because he had a better job in I think it was Washington, and he want...but he couldn't find housing in Washington, you know.
- Elaine Gunn:** [laugh] Yeah.
- Rozena Rose:** He wanted to expose his kids to Blacks because they had not—
- Elaine Gunn:** They had not been exposed in Burlington, Vermont?
- Rozena Rose:** Right.
- Elaine Gunn:** So, they must've gone to—they must...probably were the only Black children in school in Burlington.
- Rozena Rose:** [0:07:31] Right.
- Elaine Gunn:** Yeah. So, the children are still down there at this—his children are?
- Rozena Rose:** His children? No, they are married and scattered. As a matter of fact, his oldest daughter marr...Eddie's—my other brother's not married. Edward's oldest daughter married. She married a white fella from Schenectady, New York—
- Elaine Gunn:** Isn't that interesting? [laugh]
- Rozena Rose:** —[laugh] close to us, yes.
- Elaine Gunn:** Yeah, isn't that interesting?
- Rozena Rose:** And, so, he has another son up there in Burlington with my brother, because he didn't move with them.
- 0:08:03 And the other one, he lives in Philadelphia, I think, or some place.
- Elaine Gunn:** Interesting. Isn't that funny?
- Rozena Rose:** Yes, it is.
- Elaine Gunn:** When you were growing up, did you have any other extended family members living with you? Sometimes, we have had—

Rozena Rose: Right.

Elaine Gunn: —other family members—

Rozena Rose: No, not really. My grandmother raised us to the extent that my mother had to work. And during the winter months, she was totally away. But she took care of us and—

Elaine Gunn: So, you lived with your grandparents again?

Rozena Rose: Right. My baby brother and I, because we were split up, there was a thing that my oldest brother lived with my father and his mother.

Elaine Gunn: In...?

Rozena Rose: Which is my father's grand...my father's mother.

Elaine Gunn: Yeah, your father's mother, yes.

Rozena Rose: Right, right.

Elaine Gunn: Now, you've been married?

Rozena Rose: Oh, yes. [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: [laugh]

Rozena Rose: Too many times. [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: [laugh] Well, that's not very many now, Rozena, you know.

0:09:01

Rozena Rose: Well...

Elaine Gunn: Other people have been married [0:09:02].

Rozena Rose: OK. [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: [laugh]

Rozena Rose: Well, I guess that's true.

Elaine Gunn: [laugh] And you have children?

Rozena Rose: Right. I had nine children.

Elaine Gunn: From...?

Rozena Rose: My first marriage was to Frederick Conyers, and he was from The Bronx, New York. And his family are lovely, lovely people. And I had—

Elaine Gunn: It's nice that you can say that.

Rozena Rose: Oh, my in-laws, they were lovely. They still—they're Christians, and they're family orientated people, and it was really wonderful. Then I had to move out with the kids. I had five [cough]--twins, [0:09:41 Sabine and Freddy?]. I had four by my first marriage, and I had—oh, my second marriage was to Charlie Rose. He's from North Adams. And I had five children by him. I had a set of twins by each husband.

0:10:00

Elaine Gunn: Oh, isn't that fascinating?

Rozena Rose: My oldest were identical twins, and my babies was a boy and a girl, but they were twins.

Elaine Gunn: Oh, isn't that fascinating?

Rozena Rose: And this one and Michael have the same birthday a year apart.

Elaine Gunn: Oh, wow.

Rozena Rose: So, I have three sets of kids [0:10:15].

Elaine Gunn: [laugh] Wow, isn't that fascinating?

Rozena Rose: Oh. [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: [laugh] And you've survived all of it? [laugh]

Rozena Rose: I sure did. Both of my husbands have deceased.

Elaine Gunn: Oh, are they, really?

Rozena Rose: Mmhmm.

Elaine Gunn: Oh.

Rozena Rose: I know.

Elaine Gunn: But you're still here.

Rozena Rose: Mmhmm, and going strong.

Elaine Gunn: [laugh] Going strong.

Rozena Rose: Praise God.

Elaine Gunn: I don't think I remember any of those kids [0:10:34].

Rozena Rose: Did you know Geraldine Alexander?

Elaine Gunn: I know the Alexanders.

Rozena Rose: She married [0:10:41?].

Elaine Gunn: There was an Alexander, something Alexander.

Rozena Rose: Oh, right, her first husband was—he worked at the Cadillac place on South Street, Walter Alexander.

Elaine Gunn: Walter Alexander.

Rozena Rose: I'm sure you remember Walter. That was her husband, her first husband.

Elaine Gunn: OK.

Rozena Rose: I married her brother, and they're from North Adams.

Elaine Gunn: OK.

0:11:00

Rozena Rose: OK. She used to live with Lil—

Elaine Gunn: Lil Woods.

Rozena Rose: —when they had the beauty parlor. She, Lil, was her guardian.

Elaine Gunn: OK. There were a lot of those children, if I remember correctly, that Lil Williams raised.

Rozena Rose: Right. Well, she was one of them.

Elaine Gunn: She was one of them, OK.

Rozena Rose: [0:11:14]

Elaine Gunn: [0:11:14] hear Walt Alexander's name.

Rozena Rose: Ah, OK.

Elaine Gunn: What's the other daughter named? Tracy?

Rozena Rose: Tracy, that's right. And Charlie Rose is her uncle. He used to [0:11:24] around with Mabel's brothers, the boxer in North Adams, you know, Mabel Hamilton.

Elaine Gunn: I know Mabel but I don't know any of these people from North Adams. I never knew any of them, except for the Greens—

Rozena Rose: All right, the Greens.

Elaine Gunn: —the Green girls.

Rozena Rose: OK. Now, her son married Tracy's sister but they're divorced now. He's married again. Small world, isn't it?

Elaine Gunn: Small world—

Rozena Rose: [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: —absolutely, small world.

Rozena Rose: Yeah.

Elaine Gunn: Wow. How did you meet? How did you meet your husband?

Rozena Rose: Well, I was living in a double house. Geraldine owned the house, and she rent it to me, the other half of her house.

0:12:02 And her brother came from Boston to visit, and I'm living next door with my kids, with my four kids—

Elaine Gunn: [laugh] Yeah.

Rozena Rose: —me four, no more.

Elaine Gunn: [laugh]

Rozena Rose: And we met.

Elaine Gunn: And your first husband?

Rozena Rose: He was—I left him. He was in—he went to New York [0:12:21].

Elaine Gunn: OK. But how did you meet him? Was he living here?

Rozena Rose: Oh, I met him on a blind date. OK. I met him—oh, you’re really making me think.

Elaine Gunn: [laugh]

Rozena Rose: You remember—oh. Oh, she has an upholstery business.

Elaine Gunn: Lil?

Rozena Rose: Lil, right.

Elaine Gunn: [0:12:44]

Rozena Rose: Lil. Well, her son had met Fred. He came up here with Vivian Hannibal [0:12:58]. OK, her son.

0:13:00 You remember Vivian Hannibal? Did you know her? Well, anyway, her husband, he was a much younger man than she was. He was our age, and they came up here together from New York, the three of them. And Golden, Charlie Golden, he introduced me to my husband through a blind date. You probably went to a party with him.

Elaine Gunn: Yeah.

Rozena Rose: He was very quiet. And then he [0:13:26 tricked me?] because my mouth was so big.

Elaine Gunn: [laugh]

Rozena Rose: [laugh] Yes, that’s how I met him.

Elaine Gunn: No, I don’t really remember him. [0:13:32]

Rozena Rose: No, he was around.

Elaine Gunn: Yeah, I just don’t remember it. Of course, it’s a funny thing when we were all young and going to the same parties and dance, and then got married, and then began—

Rozena Rose: Right, going our different ways, taking care of business.

Elaine Gunn: [0:13:48] taking care of children-raising [0:13:49].

Rozena Rose: Right, right. And, also, you were in Great Barrington.

Elaine Gunn: I was in Great Barrington.

Rozena Rose: And I was here—

Elaine Gunn: Pittsfield.

Rozena Rose: —and only if we were shopping or something, we would—

Elaine Gunn: Exactly. It was very different. It was very different.

Rozena Rose: Yeah.

0:14:00

Elaine Gunn: And you belong to a church. I know you do. So, you want to tell us about your church affiliation? [laugh]

Rozena Rose: Oh, you don't want me to talk about [0:14:06].

Elaine Gunn: [laugh] No, just a—

Rozena Rose: Yes, I go to—it's an anti-denominational church, the church next to the big Y.

Elaine Gunn: OK.

Rozena Rose: OK, that building. And God has truly blessed me. I gave my life to the Lord when my son died. He died in '72, and I was born again in '73 because my life was just—you know, I had lost my husband a year prior and, you know, it was just me and nine children, and it was just—it was real hard. So, anyway, I go to church there, and it really has made Christianity my lifestyle.

Elaine Gunn: Great. Now, you said lost your husband. This is your second husband?

Rozena Rose: Charlie Rose is my second husband. But I had lost him, and then, a year later, my son died.

Elaine Gunn: He died suddenly here in Pittsfield?

0:15:01

Rozena Rose: He drowned. He was going to university [0:15:03].

Elaine Gunn: I know your son was.

- Rozena Rose:** Oh, Charlie? No, he was working in Florida, and he was on his way back to Pittsfield, and he had a stroke—thrombosis—and he had to go—
- Elaine Gunn:** Coronary.
- Rozena Rose:** —off the road into the hospital, and he died there. So, we had to get him from [0:15:19 Rountree?], North Carolina up here, Rocky Mountain, North Carolina to—no, it was [0:15:23 Rountree, Rountree?], North Carolina to Pittsfield.
- Elaine Gunn:** [0:15:27 What a trauma?]
- Rozena Rose:** Yeah. So, I could write a book. [laugh]
- Elaine Gunn:** Yeah, obviously, oh, dear.
- Rozena Rose:** Praise God. [0:15:33]
- Elaine Gunn:** I understand, yes. So, you've had a lot of tragedy? But you've come through it somehow by having faith?
- Rozena Rose:** Oh, yes. [laugh]
- Elaine Gunn:** [laugh] Yes. What about some of the church memories you have of growing up?
- Rozena Rose:** I did not grow up in a church. What happened was—let me backtrack. I went to a Baptist church. Down south is Baptist, OK. But my mother, she sent me to Sunday School.
- 0:16:01
- And that's about the extent of my church. But, for some reason, I've always believed—I didn't understand. I remember as a young girl, standing in the yard wondering how this got here, how that, and looking up, you know. So, I've always had a belief, but I didn't know how to put it in context until after my son died, and supernaturally, things happened to me. It was amazing.
- Elaine Gunn:** It's kept you going, obviously. Wonderful. Did your family have reunions and things like that when they were scattered?
- Rozena Rose:** Well, because my family's so big, everybody would come here. Now, my in-laws, I mentioned, they used to come here and—because, you know, and I had this big house—

0:17:01

Elaine Gunn: Yes.

Rozena Rose: —we all gathered, congregated here. And I considered them as they're much a part of my family because, see, I never had a sister. These are girls. A pastor—one of them's a pastor and, you know, they took me in. They just really [0:17:16] life. And we used to congregate here. Now, my brother in Silver Springs, we don't see each other too often. But our father's [0:17:28 side?] we do. And, so, he comes up here.

Elaine Gunn: The other brother?

Rozena Rose: Right. But as far as a family reunion for cousins and all, no. No, we haven't had that. I talk to my brother about it, but we wouldn't know where to begin to find the [0:17:41], you know, because our family's just the three of us, and my mother was an only child.

Elaine Gunn: Oh, that was [0:17:47].

Rozena Rose: But I made up the difference.

Elaine Gunn: Yes, you have. [laugh]

Rozena Rose: [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: But you must've gone to picnics and things like that?

Rozena Rose: Oh, I used to have them on my mother's side. We used to go to lakes, and we, everybody, congregate, friends and everybody else.

0:18:03

And my mom used to buy all the food. You know, like, people come and bring—if you wanted to bring a dish, you did. But most times, people didn't bring a dish, and we'd do all the cooking. We'd go to the lake, and have a wonderful time. Then, you know, I bought this house, and we—our backyard, and we'd all congregate here, yeah. It's just been recently that I stopped doing that because it's just too much work.

Elaine Gunn: So, you and your second husband lived here?

Rozena Rose: Matter of fact, we bought the house, and he died—I think we got things to—it was just a matter of a few months, I

think, because he came and did the floors for me, and then he went to Florida. He wanted me to come down there and spend a couple of days. And I said no because we wasn't getting along too well so, you know, just separate for a while and see what happen, and that's what happened.

0:19:00

He died on his way back home.

Elaine Gunn:

Now, where did you live in Pittsfield while you were going to—

Rozena Rose:

School?

Elaine Gunn:

—school?

Rozena Rose:

311 Columbus Avenue, the flat iron block.

Elaine Gunn:

OK. [0:19:11 I don't know that yet?]

Rozena Rose:

Yeah, riverside on [0:19:13]—

Elaine Gunn:

Oh, OK.

Rozena Rose:

—in the flat iron block right next to it.

Elaine Gunn:

OK.

Rozena Rose:

That's where.

Elaine Gunn:

OK. The big apartment building?

Rozena Rose:

That brick building. It's been gone so many years, you might've forgot.

Elaine Gunn:

Yeah, I have forgotten, yeah.

Rozena Rose:

Right next to the riverside.

Elaine Gunn:

OK, OK. So, then you—

Rozena Rose:

That's where I lived.

Elaine Gunn:

So, you walked to school?

Rozena Rose:

Mhmm.

Elaine Gunn:

OK.

Rozena Rose:

Oh, yes.

Elaine Gunn: Are you a member of any civic organization, any community organization—

Rozena Rose: No.

Elaine Gunn: —church, etc.?

Rozena Rose: No. I used to be. I was an activist some years ago with a school program called Follow Through, and I was very much involved in it.

Elaine Gunn: Nancy Hall was in that.

Rozena Rose: And I—after I gave my life to the Lord, I just let go all of that, and found out who I was.

0:20:04 And then I came to see the truth in things now. Nobody asks me, so I don't bother. You know, I'm just involved in the church.

Elaine Gunn: But you say you're not really an activist now. But just since I've been here, I've noticed that people—

Rozena Rose: Oh, yes.

Elaine Gunn: —apparently gravitate to you, and children see you.

Rozena Rose: But it comes under a different—well, I see what you're saying. OK, that's true but that's my lifestyle. And people gravitate [0:20:39]—

Elaine Gunn: So, people see you as...?

Rozena Rose: I don't know. I just—if they come to me, I won't turn them away.

Elaine Gunn: Yeah, as someone they can come to for help if they need to?

Rozena Rose: Right, right. But it's not me; it's just not anything I do. [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: Well, then it's true. [laugh]

Rozena Rose: Well, I mean, in other words, there's nothing like—for example, when I was an activist—

0:21:01

- Elaine Gunn:** You don't have a [0:21:02 shingle?] but you [laugh]...
- Rozena Rose:** Yeah, I was an activist in the community, and they knew Rozena is with Follow Through, and this organization and that organization. She's on the board here, and she's on the board there, and she—OK. I had an identity, OK. But I'm not that. When people call me, they know that I'm a Chri...for example—
- Elaine Gunn:** They're looking for some spiritual?
- Rozena Rose:** Right. For example, a lady—young woman—came to see me, and I knew she—you know, and I said, "Oh, you want to talk to me, that's fine. But you know what I represent." She said, "I know." And I took her up to my bedroom, and she had been diagnosed with cancer, and we sat and we talked. You see what I'm saying? So, my identity is not the same as before. When people talk to me, they know who they're talking to, and I won't—I will tell the truth, you know. And if you need something, then I'll point you to where you need to go [0:21:51]. You call that an [0:21:53 act?]. [laugh]
- Elaine Gunn:** Interesting. Well, no, that's not—that's something very special. I don't know what that is.
- Rozena Rose:** Oh. [laugh]
- 0:21:58
- Elaine Gunn:** But it's something very special obviously that you can—that you have this—
- Rozena Rose:** I love people.
- Elaine Gunn:** Obviously, and you can reach out to people when they need help.
- Rozena Rose:** Yeah.
- Elaine Gunn:** And they feel that they [0:22:08]—
- Rozena Rose:** But they reach to me. But that amazes me. They reach out to me.
- Elaine Gunn:** That means you have special quality that enables them—enables you to help these people reach out to you.

- Rozena Rose:** Well, that's the Christ because he gives me wisdom. It amazes me sometimes what comes out of my mouth.
- Elaine Gunn:** Yes, wonderful.
- Rozena Rose:** [laugh]
- Elaine Gunn:** Wonderful. We don't know, do we, what's in store for us.
[laugh]
- Rozena Rose:** I'll tell you, it's great things. [laugh]
- Elaine Gunn:** Yes. Well, tell me about—you went to high school here in Pittsfield. But you went to elementary school, obviously, in—
- Rozena Rose:** In Alabama.
- Elaine Gunn:** —Alabama. Now, what memories do you have about your school experience here? And maybe you could talk a little bit about how they might compare with the school experiences you had in Alabama. [laugh]
- Rozena Rose:** Oh, in Alabama? Well, in Alabama—oh, in Pittsfield, it was different there because I was in the ninth grade when I left there.
- 0:23:00 I came here in tenth grade. And I was—it was an amazing school. I guess I was friendly but I wasn't friendly because this was a whole different environment. This was a white environment. I came out of a Black environment. And they did not know how to take me, and I guess I didn't know how to take them. So, I couldn't say I was standoffish. I was friendly to everybody. But I guess that's kind of my personality anyway, I guess. I don't force my way, you know, in anything. Yet, I can be friendly if [0:23:34].
- Elaine Gunn:** Yeah, yeah.
- Rozena Rose:** I liked school but I learned how to manipulate the teachers to become the teacher's pet.
- Elaine Gunn:** [laugh]
- Rozena Rose:** You know, I didn't stir anything.
- Elaine Gunn:** [laugh]

Rozena Rose: You know, I'd see other kids getting in trouble, and I would—I remember skipping school for 30 days.

Elaine Gunn: In Pittsfield or in Alabama?

Rozena Rose: Pittsfield High School, 30 days.

0:23:58

Elaine Gunn: Oh, wow. How'd you get away with that?

Rozena Rose: We went—I was [0:24:03].

Elaine Gunn: [laugh]

Rozena Rose: [laugh] I knew what to do not to get caught. I went where people when they expect you to be. See, they go where you're going to get caught. And I said, no, no [0:24:16].

Elaine Gunn: [laugh]

Rozena Rose: We go back to school, and the dean—we had deans at that time. “Well, I know, Rozena”—because I'd never been in trouble before.

Elaine Gunn: Yeah.

Rozena Rose: “Rozena didn't leave. You guys just led Roz...” They got expelled.

Elaine Gunn: Oh, my goodness.

Rozena Rose: [0:24:32]

Elaine Gunn: So, there were others with you?

Rozena Rose: Oh, yeah, there was about five of us.

Elaine Gunn: Oh, wow. All girls or what?

Rozena Rose: Girls.

Elaine Gunn: Yeah.

Rozena Rose: And we did go to my house; get out in time before my mom came home from work. And how we got caught, ran into my mother's boyfriend.

Elaine Gunn: [laugh]

Rozena Rose: And that's when we got caught. And I said, "I'm going to school tomorrow."

Elaine Gunn: [laugh]

Rozena Rose: "No, I'm going to school tomorrow because my mom, oh, she's going to kill me." But I didn't get expelled from school because I'd never got—"We know Rozena didn't leave. We knew you leave."

0:25:02 And I—

Elaine Gunn: There's got to be something; either that or [0:25:06].

Rozena Rose: [laugh] But, see, I'm not a very good follower if you don't know what you're doing.

Elaine Gunn: Yeah, yeah. [laugh]

Rozena Rose: [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: That's amazing. Oh, god, that's amazing.

Rozena Rose: [laugh] That was amazing. I look back on that. But today—well, anyway, and compared to the school in Birmingham?

Elaine Gunn: Mmhmm.

Rozena Rose: I was teacher's pet, you know. And my mother—see, down south, you had to buy all of your books [0:25:30].

Elaine Gunn: Yeah, I've heard that. I've heard that, yeah.

Rozena Rose: The school didn't provide that for you.

Elaine Gunn: And they were segregated at that time.

Rozena Rose: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. And my mother—everything I needed, I had. I had all my pencils and my books. And I remember my mother went over to the school once, and a teacher said, "She is perfect. We have no problems with her. But she just don't want anybody to bother her or use her things."

Elaine Gunn: [laugh]

Rozena Rose: And that was [0:25:54], you know.

Elaine Gunn: Yeah.

0:25:55

Rozena Rose: And I learned how to protect myself when, one year, I went to school, I stayed with my father's mother, and I went to school there for a few months. I don't remember—well, they used to whip me coming home from school because these were over there on that side of town. They were kind of rough. Where I lived with my mother was a nice little [0:26:17]. And my brother, I'll never forget, they took a sideboard off of the fence. No, not my brother; my brother's friend. He said, "Now, she's not going to beat you today." Her name was [0:26:32 Queena?]. They used to take my lunch money, take my lunch [0:26:35 beat her today?] and they stood over me while I just—you know. I never had any problems.

Elaine Gunn: I bet you didn't. [laugh]

Rozena Rose: [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: I bet you didn't. [laugh]

Rozena Rose: And it felt good. I was fine protecting myself. And from that point on, nobody ever bothered me. I never got into fights. They told me all they had to do was look in my eyes if I got in an argument or anything, because I'd tell people, "Leave me alone. Walk away." And they said they'd look at me, and they knew.

Elaine Gunn: Isn't that something interesting? It's [0:27:00].

0:27:01

Well, tell me now, when you were going to school in Pittsfield, the one in Pittsfield High, did you have any white friends?

Rozena Rose: Not outside of school.

Elaine Gunn: Mhmm, in school.

Rozena Rose: Matter of school—well, in school, I was congenial with everybody, and I talked to anyone. At lunch, you would sit and talk. But after school, there—because during those days, you were segregated even. But one thing I learned about coming up here, and that I didn't like it—and I still have not adjusted to Pittsfield, you know, up here—is that everything is under the rug. It's like a snake crawling under the rug that you know is there, you see it.

- Elaine Gunn:** You know it's there, OK.
- Rozena Rose:** But down south, you know, it was in the open, OK. And my—I was best friends with white people but they would say—would use the word “nigger” but, honey, that's mine. We're going to take care, and they did. If you went to jail, they'd take you and get you out of jail, and they'd take care of your families.
- 0:27:59
- It was different, OK, because the people my mother worked for, we couldn't go in the front door. We went in the back door. But she took—that family took care of her. They were rich, they had money, and they took care of us, you know. We had needs, they would take care. But up here, it was so different, and I had not that trust, you know. But people went their separate ways. I only had two best friends since I've been in Pittsfield, and I guess I'm lucky I had two best friends. And one was Rosemary Chambers. Remember Rosemary?
- Elaine Gunn:** Yeah, I think that name's familiar.
- Rozena Rose:** She and I used to be together all the time. We used to go to dances together.
- Elaine Gunn:** Yeah.
- Rozena Rose:** Jimmy Williamson's father of [0:28:38] his father—his name was Jimmy Williamson. He used to go with my mother. OK.
- Elaine Gunn:** His father—
- Rozena Rose:** Used to go with my mother.
- Elaine Gunn:** —Jim Williamson's father, he went with your mother? OK. [0:28:47].
- Rozena Rose:** Right. And then his daughter and I became very close friends.
- Elaine Gunn:** His oldest daughter?
- Rozena Rose:** His oldest daughter, Rosemary.
- Elaine Gunn:** OK.

Rozena Rose: And we used to go to dances together all the time. And then the other one must've been Mabel Hamilton.

0:29:00

Elaine Gunn: OK. Oh, so, you and Mabel are friends?

Rozena Rose: Yeah, we got together through activism in the community.

Elaine Gunn: Because I know she's been an activist.

Rozena Rose: Right. I was chairman of the board, and she was the coordinator, so we got together through it, and we used to work together.

Elaine Gunn: [laugh] Isn't that something? Yeah. I do—I see Mabel more than I see you. I see—

Rozena Rose: [0:29:17]

Elaine Gunn: Well, she sings at various things.

Rozena Rose: Right, right.

Elaine Gunn: [0:29:21] But, anyhow, yeah, well, interesting. So, then, you would then go to any of the—did you go to any of the dances at Pittsfield High when they used to have dances there?

Rozena Rose: No. No, because during that time, we were having our own dances at [0:29:38 CIO Hall?]. We used to—because, as a teenager, I was beginning to come out, and my mother used to take us, and they'd sit and watch us dance. So, no, I—because their dances was totally different. We considered them little baby things.

Elaine Gunn: Yes.

Rozena Rose: [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: What I can remember, Rozena, they used to have something at the Y on Friday nights.

0:30:01
Didn't they have some kind of local dances at the Y? I know we came from Great Barrington a couple of times.

Rozena Rose: They might've.

Elaine Gunn: Something that they called—they were [0:30:10]. Some little dances that they would have from [0:30:13 7 to 11?].

Rozena Rose: I might have went in and looked, and then left.

Elaine Gunn: Yes.

Rozena Rose: But I don't think think—

[End of Recording]

[Begin Recording]

Rozena Rose: —and they would have big name bands coming in. Louis Jordan was in Albany, and [0:00:10 Little Ivy?] and we was going—yes, we had other [0:00:14]. Well, of course, that was big time for us.

Elaine Gunn: Big time.

Rozena Rose: And the little things they had here [0:00:18]. [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: I remember going over to see Duke Ellington [0:00:21] and Jimmy [0:00:22]. [laugh]

Rozena Rose: Right, right.

Elaine Gunn: Yes. The kind of jobs that you've done or held throughout your life, you remember?

Rozena Rose: Mmhmm.

Elaine Gunn: OK. You remember your first one?

Rozena Rose: My first one, yes. I was 16 years old, and I worked in the sanitary [0:00:38] after school and on weekends, and that's when I began to buy my clothes, had money, and it was just [0:00:45 wonderful?]. And I held that job for a number of years. Excuse me. And then I went from there to [pause]—what was it?

0:01:02

Elaine Gunn: What did you do after high school, after graduation?

Rozena Rose: Remember Bill Morehead?

Elaine Gunn: Sure, I remember Bill Morehead.

- Rozena Rose:** Well, we were engaged to get married and—
- Elaine Gunn:** I'd forgotten about Bill Morehead.
- Rozena Rose:** Yeah, and I must've been about 18, right after high school, and we were going to get married. And I caught him in a compromised position, so I broke that off. So, I rode around for [0:01:35] a year or so. And I'm trying to remember. Oh, I went into—I waited tables because I had planned to go to college, and I had begun to buy some clothes and things. But it just didn't work out, and my interest was gone. So, I started working in [0:01:55 Lennox?]. I waited tables. I did a lot of waitress work, especially during the season, and the [0:02:00 Lock In?].
- 0:02:02 I worked there, and I was chambermaid because they were open year-round.
- Elaine Gunn:** Sure.
- Rozena Rose:** And I used to—because I was congenial with people, I made a lot of tips [1:45:30]. So—
- Elaine Gunn:** Were you down there when [0:02:15 Jenny?] got a job working there?
- Rozena Rose:** Yeah. We got a lot of people down there because we came when he first opened. His sister married a [0:02:25 Kaufman, Victoria?]. That was his sister. She came up, the [0:02:30 Rappaports?] from New York. They had [0:02:32]—
- Elaine Gunn:** So, they had the money? They had the money.
- Rozena Rose:** [0:02:33]
- Elaine Gunn:** [0:02:33]
- Rozena Rose:** The brother?
- Elaine Gunn:** Yeah.
- Rozena Rose:** Who owned it?
- Elaine Gunn:** And ran it. Somebody who ran it, yeah.
- Rozena Rose:** So, I worked with them for quite—because then I had—I got married. And that's when I went back to work down

there. And then I did various jobs in waitressing, and then I decided to go to school.

0:03:01

But then I had a lot of kids because I was having babies, boom, boom, boom. I had them every year, you know. So, I would do housework, and then I'd go back, and if I could pick up a waitress job because I liked that, and they were good tips. Then I started volunteering in the community as an activist, and that really took up a great portion of my time because my kids was in school, and that's how it started, by being interested in school and what they were doing. Then I went from there to [0:03:40 Virgil?] County Constituent Service, and I worked for them for a number of years, and set up programs, some of the programs over the years that they still have some of the programs that we set up at the Constituent Service. And I used to go on talks, and doing different stuff.

0:03:58

And then I went to work at [0:04:02].

Elaine Gunn:

So, you did a variety of a jobs.

Rozena Rose:

And I stayed with them until they closed.

Elaine Gunn:

They closed. And when did they close?

Rozena Rose:

In 1988.

Elaine Gunn:

Oh, that was quite a while.

Rozena Rose:

Mmhmm.

Elaine Gunn:

Nineteen years.

Rozena Rose:

And they went to New York State, so I just retired from that. But as far as me retiring, I think I'm busy right now because I had kids with me then too. I'd go to work. [laugh]

Elaine Gunn:

[laugh]

Rozena Rose:

So, my life has always been busy, busy.

Elaine Gunn:

Busy, yes, yeah. And that's good. It's kept you young-looking and young. [laugh]

Rozena Rose:

[laugh]

- Elaine Gunn:** That's great. When you were—a little bit about your childhood and teenage memories that you've already touched on, the kinds of games you played, for instance.
- Rozena Rose:** Oh, I liked to—I remember as a little girl, you know, parents were very strict. You didn't go to anybody's house unless they were there if you was out of the neighborhood.
- 0:05:01
- Now, in the neighborhood, you could go up and down the street, as long as they could see you when they come to the door. And I loved to play. I used to like sports. I used to love to play baseball.
- Elaine Gunn:** Were you involved in sports in high school at all?
- Rozena Rose:** In high school.
- Elaine Gunn:** You were here at Pittsfield High?
- Rozena Rose:** Right. I played field hockey and baseball in high school. Oh, I played basketball too. I liked—I was a guard. I forgot about that. I like sports. Even today, I like [0:05:26]. But as a kid, I used to like to play games, hopscotch, I loved it because I was competitive. I liked to do things that were competitive; that there was always a winner. Running, I used to like that. And my mother, when she went to visit her friends, I loved staying out after dark because then we could stay outside and play after dark as long as Mom was busy with her, and I could play with the kids. And I can remember that.
- Elaine Gunn:** Yeah, that sounds familiar. [laugh]
- Rozena Rose:** Yeah.
- Elaine Gunn:** You remember learning anything in school, any recitations?
- 0:06:03
- You remember, sometimes people had the [0:06:05] remember, used to recite all the time, especially elementary school?
- Rozena Rose:** Yes, we had recitations. And, as I said, I was teacher's pet, and they would put me upfront because I could always remember, and I would try and do the best. Well, when you're the teacher's pet, you're motivated because they motivate you, and they're always putting you out there and you get—you know, so I did.

Elaine Gunn: Yeah, [0:06:29]. [laugh]

Rozena Rose: But then when I came to Pittsfield, I can remember having an accent. Now, they told me that I had the accent, and I said, “No, I do not have an accent. You do,” see, because I couldn’t hear me the way I heard everybody else.

Elaine Gunn: [laugh] Yes, yes.

Rozena Rose: So, when I went to school, my English teacher, [0:06:52 Mrs. Mariner?], I’ll never forget it, I sat in the back because I didn’t want to—you know.

Elaine Gunn: [0:06:57] [laugh]

0:06:59

Rozena Rose: And what she did, she put me on the front row, right in front of her, and she says, “I’m going to have you read every day.” And she did. But that was positive attention, and I bloomed.

Elaine Gunn: You’re talking about 10th grade in Pittsfield High?

Rozena Rose: Mmhmm, and I remember sonics symbols in English, and poetry, writing of poetry, and this was in the 10th grade. And I had her again in the 12th grade. And what I had—I was a student in her class because she went—all the seniors used to repeat all [0:07:34]. And I remember in poetry writing, I loved it, and she would always call on me, you know, and I would read, and that really brought out my diction. And she’d say, “No, we pronounce this word this”—because Massachusetts, I used to pronounce “Massatoosetts,” you know.

Elaine Gunn: Yes, still do.

Rozena Rose: And she would correct me. And it got to the place I was not [0:07:54] “Oh, you’re teacher’s pet.”

Elaine Gunn: Yeah. [laugh]

Rozena Rose: But I can remember that, and she put a lot of time in it.

0:08:00

Elaine Gunn: Yeah. That’s wonderful. And it’s good that you—usually, there is one teacher so that you—who’s spent time with you

or who really thought you were worth something, who valued you.

Rozena Rose: Right, right.

Elaine Gunn: And I don't know if you remember—

Rozena Rose: And I liked math. I was good in my math class too. But, see, if you do, you were motivated, it was easy because [0:08:17]. Same today.

Elaine Gunn: Same today, yeah. Now, when you were growing up in your mother's home or your grandmother's home, did you have chores to do [0:08:26]?

Rozena Rose: Yes, my chore...down south, we owned our home, and we had gardens on each side, and we had cherry trees, peach trees. And on the back, we had a coal house, and my job was to keep co...we had fireplaces and we had pot belly stoves. And my job was to keep wood and coal in the house, and then I had to wash dishes. That was my job because I was little. And I got to the point I was very meticulous about my clothes.

0:08:59 And I did not like cat faces in my clothes, so I had to learn to iron real early because my grandma said, "I'm not ironing clothes."

Elaine Gunn: [laugh]

Rozena Rose: And nobody could iron my clothes to suit me, so. My mother could, but my grandmother couldn't. She'd leave cat faces.

Elaine Gunn: Yeah, cat faces, I remember.

Rozena Rose: So, I was—oh, I must've been about 9 years old, and I learned to iron.

Elaine Gunn: Certainly, it's stood you in good stead today. [laugh] I'm certain it's been good for you, even today. [laugh]

Rozena Rose: [laugh] Oh, yes. Everything we learned, that's good.

Elaine Gunn: That's good, yes. [laugh]

Rozena Rose: [0:09:30]

- Elaine Gunn:** Had a beginning somewhere.
- Rozena Rose:** Right.
- Elaine Gunn:** And speaking of things that you learned, what kinds of values did you learn from your parents would you say were important things that you learned?
- Rozena Rose:** Oh, number one, you respect your parents or you will get—you will have to go outside—we had peach trees, right—and pull three limbs—because peach tree limbs are very thin—and you [0:09:54 break?] the peach tree limbs, and you come in the house, and you lay on the floor, and give me your legs.
- 0:10:01 And my mom got me right there [smacks].
- Elaine Gunn:** [laugh]
- Rozena Rose:** Because I was the one that she had to really—I was the [0:10:08].
- Elaine Gunn:** A mind of your own. [laugh]
- Rozena Rose:** Oh, yes, I had a mind of my own. [0:10:11 Alfonso?], he was so nice and passive. And when anything went down, she knew that I led it.
- Elaine Gunn:** [laugh]
- Rozena Rose:** You know Mom, don't you?
- Elaine Gunn:** Yes, yes.
- Rozena Rose:** But, number one, you res...and I loved my mom. I loved my grandmother. They were very sweet people, but they were very strict but they loved me, and I knew that. And there were rules in the house, and I had to abide by those rules—not only in the house. I had to respect the people in the community when I passed. Now, down south, there's a habit of calling aunt and uncle that's not aunt and uncle. I wasn't allowed to do that. But I called Mrs. Jones by her name, Mrs. Jones. I always put a—
- Elaine Gunn:** [0:10:50 Handle?] [laugh]

Rozena Rose: —[0:10:51 handle?]. “Good morning, Mrs. Jones.” I better not walk past Mrs. Jones. However, she’s sitting on the porch. “How are you, babe?” They called me “babe.”

Elaine Gunn: Yeah.

0:11:00

Rozena Rose: “Babe? Oh, you’re growing big.” “Yes, Miss Jones.” And that was people on the street. And we couldn’t do nothing out of order because it got back to my mother before I got home.

Elaine Gunn: Oh, yes, I remember that. [laugh]

Rozena Rose: Oh, yes. But it was good. It was good, especially for me because my personality’s the type that, you know, it can be strong, you know. But my mother knew how to handle me. My grandmother was very strict but my mother was like this. And when I went to a movie, I always wrote to ask her if I could go, or anyplace I went. And then she would say if it’s OK, yes, and then she’d send me the money, and then I would go, you know. But I look back on my life, and I appreciate that because it gave me some discipline within me.

Elaine Gunn: And did it also help you pass this on to your own children?

Rozena Rose: Yes, it helped me not to take some things because my own kids, yeah, it time to go.

0:11:59

It’s time for us to part ways, and you—that’s your lifestyle. It’s not mine. Right, because, see, I had nine kids, and I had six-footers, and I was short. I’m down here.

Elaine Gunn: [laugh]

Rozena Rose: And I—let’s talk.

Elaine Gunn: Yes.

Rozena Rose: It did help me.

Elaine Gunn: Oh, I’m certain it did, yeah.

Rozena Rose: It did. It did.

Elaine Gunn: Those lessons are very important, aren’t they?

- Rozena Rose:** It sure is.
- Elaine Gunn:** And you mentioned the discipline that your parents used, and treating others, older people in particular. I can remember they're very key; important. Sometimes, and we, in our family and many other families, African-American families in particular, when you were growing up, and you got a job, and you were, I think, 11 or 12 or 13 or so, and you got a job, you would contribute to the family—
- Rozena Rose:** Oh, yes.
- Elaine Gunn:** —50 cents or a dollar, whatever you—part of whatever you earned.
- Rozena Rose:** Right.
- Elaine Gunn:** Did you ever do that with your family?
- Rozena Rose:** OK, the way my mother did it—I told you I was working at 16. I was working [0:12:53] we made good money. You work after school and then weekends, right. What my mother did, we furnished the house.
- 0:13:00
- Now, my brother, he took care of the kitchen. My mom took care of the big stuff, like refrigerator and stuff like that. She took care of that because, every so often, the furniture needs to be replaced. OK. And my brother bought the—wait a minute. My brother bought the kitchen set. I bought the bedroom set because I saw—here I go again.
- Elaine Gunn:** [laugh]
- Rozena Rose:** I didn't want that.
- Elaine Gunn:** [laugh]
- Rozena Rose:** [laugh] Mom said, "Well, you go buy it." OK. So, I bought the whole thing; bought all the pieces to the bedroom set. And then we'd buy little things like tape players and, you know, little things to make the house comfortable. If we wanted it, my mother said, "You buy it," and that's the way. She didn't take any money, but we brought for the house. Like, I wanted wallpaper in the living room. "Well, you go in there, and you do it." And I bought the wallpaper.
- Elaine Gunn:** It's a great way, yeah. And then it's all of you [0:13:58] it's the home for everybody.

0:13:59

Rozena Rose:

Right, right, we were all responsible because, see now, there were—we didn't have father. So, it was just my mother and us, you know. So, we saw—we were very close. And that's another thing that I—that's very important to me. My mother, I can remember saying—her telling us—we were teenagers now, you know—"I don't care where I am but you kids should always stick together. You should always be there for one another." Because that extended mentality was there because my great-grandmother was going—was Indian Cherokee, and she was going to adopt me. And the reason for that was she had some money coming if she had a child, and I was her baby, OK. And my mom said she used to carry me around on a pillow. But she died before the adoption went through, OK? But there was always—my grandmother was very much a part in all of that, OK.

0:15:02

Now, I don't—well, 3 months old. I don't remember my great-grandmother. But I saw pictures of her brother and her, and they had the long grays and—you know. So, that mentality was always there because my grandmother helped my mother with us. So, this is the way it has come up. But I notice one thing: divorces has been prevalent. Once is here, and they go, and I notice broken families. It goes right down the line. There's something there that has to be broken in order to stop it. But that has come through. And the addiction in my family, it goes back to the Indian tribes where they drank, going back. And it come through even on my husbands' side—both husbands, they were drinkers, and I married them both. So, that says something there. I mean, I know what it is now. But that was a part of them, yeah. But as far—it's there, you see, even with my kids.

0:16:01

But as far as the respect from me, and the closeness, it's still there. Now, my kids, they do their thing, but they will not bring it around me. And when they feel like talking, they'll tell me anything, when they feel. I don't go and pry.

Elaine Gunn:

Yeah, that's wonderful.

Rozena Rose:

The one I said was married, if they come to me, I can know whatever. But if you come to me, we'll sit down and we'll talk about it, and I will tell you the truth. But other than sticking my nose in it...

- Elaine Gunn:** Yeah. Well, some thing, you're just [0:16:32]—
- Rozena Rose:** Right. but we remain a very close family. If there's problems, we'll help you. And if I can't help you, bye.
- Elaine Gunn:** Well, that's good that you have that relationship with your children.
- Rozena Rose:** Like, taking care of my grandchildren, I leave that space for their parents. If their parents get their lives together, they're bonding, that's your child. That's what I was telling this young lady here. And a lot of things I talk about, I've lived it, so I know it.
- Elaine Gunn:** You know it, yeah.
- Rozena Rose:** And they want to know, "Well, how can you do that?" It's just something that I know I can do.
- 0:17:01 I bond as a grandmother. Well, that's it. I'm a grandmother. I'm not a mother. And I leave that space for Mom and Dad, and that—because I have that respect for them too.
- Elaine Gunn:** I'm sure.
- Rozena Rose:** So, it's kind of strange but—
- Elaine Gunn:** No, it's not. If it works [laugh]...
- Rozena Rose:** —I look at my family. They're supposed to be so dysfunctional in dealing with the law and the courts and all this. And then I look inside our other families who look so good out, and I said, "My god."
- Elaine Gunn:** Then you know. [laugh]
- Rozena Rose:** That's [0:17:29 life though?].
- Elaine Gunn:** But every family has a part that's dysfunctional.
- Rozena Rose:** Well, every family's dysfunctional until [0:17:35 Jesus put it together?].
- Elaine Gunn:** Yes, exactly. [laugh]
- Rozena Rose:** [laugh] But, you know, society says what they—you know, it's OK. But I do maintain that respect, and I get it, and I expect it from my kids and anybody that's around me. And

if you can't give it, you know, we need to part ways. And that's where my kids—

Elaine Gunn: [0:17:56] I'm certain they understand that.

Rozena Rose: Oh [0:17:58].

Elaine Gunn: [0:17:58] understand it. It's so important.

0:18:01 Do you have any favorite recipes or some that your mother or grandmother [0:18:08]?

Rozena Rose: Now, I'm not a baker. But I cook. I didn't do cooking as a youngster. My grandmother used to bake breads, everything, because we didn't have any money, you know. Potato bread, I loved it, you know. And she did all the cooking and the canning. My mother didn't either. So, some simple things that my mother cooked, but I learned how to cook when I had kids, and didn't have much money, and very little. I learned to be resourceful. I learned to make something out of nothing. I mean, we had nine kids [0:18:47].

Elaine Gunn: [laugh] Yeah, you do it. [laugh]

Rozena Rose: Now, that's when I really learnt how to cook. So, favorite? I don't think so. My kids can tell you.

0:18:59 The favorite [laugh] is what's the cheapest on the market? [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: [laugh]

Rozena Rose: Because I don't buy anything, even clothes, unless it's on sale.

Elaine Gunn: Well, it's good because today [0:19:13]—

Rozena Rose: But I learned to do that from having a lot of kids, and having to, you know, buy nine pair of shoes at one time. You'd go where you could get your discounts.

Elaine Gunn: Yeah, exactly.

Rozena Rose: So, that's [0:19:23]—

Elaine Gunn: And we've all learned that, I think.

Rozena Rose: Right.

Elaine Gunn: And thank goodness for discount stores [0:19:26].

Rozena Rose: Right. My favorite—no, I don't guess I have a favorite.

Elaine Gunn: You have any hobbies?

Rozena Rose: Reading. I like to read. I like to travel. I love to travel and meet people. But since I've been with grandchildren, I had—

Elaine Gunn: You don't have the time.

Rozena Rose: —a space between the twins when they graduated from high school, and they went to work, and a space between there for maybe a couple of years before I took my first grands.

0:20:02

Then I used to travel. I used to go to conventions a lot. I'd go to Christian conventions and things, and I used to fly. I loved that. I love meeting new people. And I suppose you could call that—would you call that a hobby?

Elaine Gunn: Certainly, traveling is certainly a hobby.

Rozena Rose: But meeting—

Elaine Gunn: Meeting people?

Rozena Rose: —strangers?

Elaine Gunn: Yeah, like—yes, yes.

Rozena Rose: Meeting—I love to meet people.

Elaine Gunn: Yeah, meet people. Sure, yeah, I think it's great. [0:20:30]

Rozena Rose: I went to Pittsburgh a few weeks ago for three days with the church, and I wasn't with the church. [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: [laugh]

Rozena Rose: There were about 30 ladies from the church. I was over here [laugh]—

Elaine Gunn: [laugh]

Rozena Rose: —meeting new people. [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: [laugh] Great.

Rozena Rose: I don't know what you'd call it though.

Elaine Gunn: You're obviously enjoying yourself. [laugh]

Rozena Rose: Oh, you know, they talk about them...I love to learn things about them.

Elaine Gunn: You learn things.

Rozena Rose: I learn a lot.

Elaine Gunn: Yeah, sure.

Rozena Rose: I learn a lot. I learn a lot about me too.

Elaine Gunn: Sure, I bet you do. Oh, learning, life's [0:20:56] a learning experience throughout [0:20:59].

Rozena Rose: It sure is.

0:21:01

Elaine Gunn: So, you don't have any crafts that you do or anything like that?

Rozena Rose: No, less patience. [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: [laugh]

Rozena Rose: I'm a mover. I don't do it. [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: [laugh]

Rozena Rose: I tried. I bought a brand new sewing machine. I got up a big box full of material.

Elaine Gunn: Yeah. [0:21:19]

Rozena Rose: I'll start that. [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: What about—?

Rozena Rose: I wish I could though. It's nice.

Elaine Gunn: It's nice. It's nice. I understand.

Rozena Rose: Yes. I see the beautiful work that people do.

Elaine Gunn: Yeah, I do too. [0:21:29].

- Rozena Rose:** [0:21:29] Oh, you don't?
- Elaine Gunn:** [laugh]
- Rozena Rose:** [laugh] Then you understand. [laugh]
- Elaine Gunn:** Nothing, nothing, no. [laugh] But I see it, and I can appreciate it.
- Rozena Rose:** Yes.
- Elaine Gunn:** Do you have any memories, any special memories of just Berkshire County in particular, or Pittsfield? Is this a special place for you to live, or would you rather live someplace else, or did anything happen here that sort of makes you feel that this is perhaps—I don't know—unusual or different or [0:22:00]—
- 0:22:00
- Rozena Rose:** [laugh]
- Elaine Gunn:** —you've lived in other places.
- Rozena Rose:** It's interesting you should say that [laugh], unusual or different.
- Elaine Gunn:** [laugh]
- Rozena Rose:** I've never adjusted to Pittsfield. Well, I'm more contented today than I've ever been. When I was younger, I was—no, I wanted to leave Pittsfield. There are many places that I suppose I could go to because I've traveled to different places that I like better than Pittsfield. But I do have nice memories because, you know, my girlfriend and I, we used to go—on Sundays, we used to go twin bicycling [0:22:29]—
- Elaine Gunn:** Oh, yeah, sure.
- Rozena Rose:** We used to twin bicycling. We used to do a lot of things. We always found things to do, and when we didn't find things to do, we made things to do.
- Elaine Gunn:** Yeah, you said you went bicycling. [0:22:40]

- Rozena Rose:** Yes, we would give parties. I remember we gave an old clothes party once. I don't know whether you remember that—
- Elaine Gunn:** I don't remember that.
- Rozena Rose:** —[0:22:47] parties, yeah. And we dressed up, and prizes was given to the one—we was in a club. You remember that big club they had here, [0:22:59 Barbara Barbara?]?
- 0:23:00
- Elaine Gunn:** Yeah, the Golden Leaf.
- Rozena Rose:** Golden Leaf, OK.
- Elaine Gunn:** [laugh]
- Rozena Rose:** They didn't want us in their club. So, we started our own club—
- Elaine Gunn:** [laugh]
- Rozena Rose:** —[laugh] me and Rosemary, started our own club. See, we were doers. We had things going all the time. And we used to do things. And we've give parties. And we gave this old clothes party where you come in in, say, an evening gown with a pair of garden gloves and old clodhopper shoes. And the one that looked the worse got the prize. We'd do things like that. And we gave another party for something. It was the most exquisite games we could play, or something like that. And we gave prizes. So, there was always—that's why we couldn't get involved in high school because we were always doing things out here. We were doing—I do—yes, that part, Rosemary and I, we were just like this.
- Elaine Gunn:** Is she still alive?
- Rozena Rose:** She's in San Diego, California. I called her a few weeks ago. She had both hip replacements. So, Lillian was here, her sister.
- 0:24:01
- Remember Lillian?
- Elaine Gunn:** I don't remember. No, I don't remember her.
- Rozena Rose:** OK. But it was Rosemary that was the one that was out there. So, I have these memories in Pittsfield of—I tell the

kids today, “You guys don’t do things.” There are a lot of things you can do that people will come in, but somebody got to get it started.

Elaine Gunn: Get it started, yes. You have to be creative.

Rozena Rose: Right. And Rosemary and I, we used to do that, and we used to cut out and go to New York when I—because I started driving at 17. And we’d leave. I worked at [0:24:31 Averlock?]. We’d leave [0:24:32 Averlock?] at 8 o’clock, go to New York, and be back 7 o’clock the next.

Elaine Gunn: Yeah, I remember you doing that. [laugh]

Rozena Rose: Yeah. [laugh] Well, there were a lot of things we did.

Elaine Gunn: Yeah. One thing I think, again, people did do, and they still do here, and they haven’t—I don’t know whether the rest of the world has caught up versus the country—learning to drive very early. I remember where I came from in Maryland, we certainly didn’t at that age. We came up here, and by the time you’re 16, you were learning to drive. [0:24:56]

Rozena Rose: Right, yeah, because I had a car at 17. My mother bought a car, and it was mine because she couldn’t drive.

0:25:00

Elaine Gunn: She couldn’t? [laugh]

Rozena Rose: [laugh] Yeah. So, that was mine. [laugh]

Elaine Gunn: Oh, that’s great. [laugh]

Rozena Rose: Yes. So, I remember doing things, and being on the go here, and meeting people because we used to go to Springfield a lot and Albany because I had the car. And I met people, and they wasn’t friendly. That was the first thing, you know. You speak to them, and they’d look at you.

Elaine Gunn: Yeah, cities. [laugh]

Rozena Rose: “What are you speaking to me for?”

Elaine Gunn: Yeah, exactly.

Rozena Rose: Right. I remember those days.

Elaine Gunn: Well, Rozena, this has been delightful. You know, I could talk on and on and on. You have a lot, you know, certain—I'm not going to ask you but—

Rozena Rose: [0:25:41] [laugh] Yes, I'm [0:25:43].

Elaine Gunn: But I want to. We're not supposed to just go on and on and on, you know. But I want to thank you very much—

Rozena Rose: So, I hope you got something.

Elaine Gunn: This is terrific, yes.

Rozena Rose: Really?

Elaine Gunn: Yes, absolutely, this is what we want, yeah, absolutely. And I want to thank you very much for letting me interview you.

Rozena Rose: Oh, you're very welcome. This is different.

0:25:59

Elaine Gunn: It's different, isn't it, yes. [laugh]

Rozena Rose: [laugh] So, you're going to compile?

Elaine Gunn: Yes, we will. Yes, Rozena. Now, you mentioned something about being a volunteer. Tell us all about it.

Rozena Rose: OK. All right. I volunteered because my kids was in the school system, and there was a new program that came on the scene called Follow Through, and I enrolled them in Follow Through. The object of Follow Through was to create parent involvement in their kids' education.

Elaine Gunn: Now, did it start with Head Start and then go—?

Rozena Rose: Head Start, yes. Then it went—

Elaine Gunn: And then Follow Through?

Rozena Rose: But I wasn't involved with Head Start. Follow Through was a federally funded program that they put into the public school. And because of my mouth, and if I see something wrong, I'm going to say it, you know, they said, "Well, you be the chairman." So, I became the chairman of Follow

Through. Out of that experience, we taught parents how to be involved with their children, the importance of their involvement with children, and the fact that they could speak, and that they had a voice in the school system.

0:27:00

Because parents were very afraid, they figured the teachers knew everything, and the principal—and we said, “No, they do not.” So, we involved them in the education of the program, and in so doing, they began to become involved in other aspects of the community. For example, things would happen at the bank. Well, we would go to the bank with them, and show them how to become involved with their checking account or whatever. And the various department, public welfare or whatever, if something came up there, you go and learn how to fight for yourself. This is wrong. The court system, we used to go in the court system, take them in the court system, and began to show them that you had a voice, and what took place; that you don’t have to accept what people say.

Elaine Gunn:

OK. And you ment...OK, I don’t what that. But I want you to—I want to make certain we get this in. You were a delegate or you were appointed, you were asked? This through Washington or—?

Rozena Rose:

Oh, this came out of the program, the Follow Through program itself. It was funded through Washington, D.C.

0:28:00

And what happened was we had to oversee everything, the finances, the curriculum, we had to—Nancy Hall, that’s how she got hired. We hired Nancy Hall, OK. We had interviews with the teacher. We learned how to do everything that they did, including where the money was going. So, we had to, once a year, go to Washington to negotiate the propo...we wrote the proposal, and we got expertise in areas that we didn’t understand. And we got in a fight with the school department. We had too much power, and the school department had, you know, but we kept it. And then we got into a verbal argument with the newspaper. That’s how we learned to personalize. We learned the politics because education, the whole ball of wax is when you deal politics, and that’s what we got into. And we brought—even got into the court system. We brought lawyers from Boston to come in and investigate—you see the recordings in the courtrooms today? We were a part of getting that installed.

0:29:00

Elaine Gunn: OK.

Rozena Rose: That's the activist part of—

Elaine Gunn: [0:29:03]

Rozena Rose: And that's how we started, from that. And then I began to get involved in [0:29:07] and they wanted to prime me for the school committee, and I said, "No, it stinks, and I don't want to be involved in the politics."

Elaine Gunn: Politics, yeah, I see.

Rozena Rose: And they wanted me, see, because I had a big mouth and a big voice—

Elaine Gunn: [laugh]

Rozena Rose: —so they wanted to shut it up.

Elaine Gunn: Yeah. Well, [0:29:23] you become one of them. [laugh]

Rozena Rose: And I couldn't do that.

Elaine Gunn: Well, tell me now, is Follow Through still a—?

Rozena Rose: No, it's not. They have the parent involvement. Now, they call it the P-A-C, PAC. It's the Title 1 program, and that's what it was. But it's now called [0:29:40 Five years of Title 1?]. But it's all rubber-stamped now. It's totally different, you know. And that was the—see, I used to get it because when you have a lot of control, you go political, because then they can't stop you.

Elaine Gunn: Interesting. I'm glad we brought this up—that you brought this up again. It's terribly important.

0:30:00

Rozena Rose: Yeah [0:30:01].

Elaine Gunn: So, what happened in Pittsfield. [laugh]

1:00:50 *Recording ends*