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INTERVIEWEE: Caroline M. Reed

INTERVIEWER: Pamela Sanchez, Shawnticia Braddy, (Wilver Patiliano?) Britney
Martinez

TRANSCRIBER: Andrea Benitez

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Unknown: Five, four, three, two, one.

Sanchez: My name is Pamela Sanchez--

Redding: Shawnticia Braddy

Patiliano: (Wilver Patiliano?)

S:--and I am at Miami, Florida Information Center on-- to interview--

Reed: (Caroline Reed?)

S: -- about her personal history. Describe where or-- where and when you were born and a bit about your parents and grandparents.

Reed: I was born here in Miami, Florida to (Wilfred and Caroline McPhee?). I have six brothers, three sisters. I never knew my grandparents. My grandparents were over in the Bahamas and I never got a chance to meet my grandparents. And it was a lot of us but we were a happy bunch, a loving bunch and we grew up with not having much. We had what we needed, but as-- back in that time, I didn't know that I didn't have much. To me, I had the world. It wasn't until you grow up and get a chance to go out of the yard that you realize that oh, this person has more than you or this person has less than you, but that

didn't bother us at that time. At age six, I started school. We had quite a distance to walk. I lived on Sixty-Ninth Street. We had to walk down to Sixty-Second Street, but back in those days, it didn't matter, you know, where you had to walk, you could walk alone or you could walk in a group, it didn't matter. You didn't have to worry about anyone harming you. And after elementary school- Liberty City Elementary- I went to Dorsey. When I first got to Dorsey, it was Dorsey High School, but they'd built Northwestern; Dorsey then became a junior high. And--

P: So, did you have any experiences with segregation as you were growing up?

Reed: Oh, yes. I would say we did have segregation because, you know, there was just certain schools that we could go to and there were schools that we could not go to and we were told that-- look at the books that you have. These are books that the white schools had finished using and, you know, it was as if we never got new textbooks and-- but it didn't matter, we learned. Whether they were old textbooks or new, we learned and that came from the teachers. We came up-- I came up on the teachers that were so dedicated. They didn't care if they only had one book, and she had that book, you were going to learn everything that was in that book because she was just that dedicated that she would teach you from that one book. And from Dorsey Junior High, I finished from Northwestern Senior High in the year of 1959. Coming up, you know, you would look for little jobs and a lot of times, the best job you could find was one of those fifteen dollar a week mother's helpers and oh, my. [laughs] You did with everything for that fifteen dollars, but that was a lot of money- fifteen dollars was a lot of money. You were able to help pay for your class ring. You were able to help pay for any little senior things that were coming up your senior year, that was a good job. I think of the children nowadays,

they don't even want fifteen dollars a day, not fifteen dollars a week. But that's what you call 'progress'. If I were them, I wouldn't want it either, but that's what you call 'progress'. You know, when we were coming up and you would-- your parents would take you downtown, oh, that was the best time. You were able to ride on the bus and you went downtown and I think about the times we would be downtown and you want to have a little hotdog and there are counters there. You go in the store, you're gonna spend your money in that store just like anyone else, but if you decide you want to have a hotdog, you couldn't sit at the counter there, I remember that. You had to go in the back. They had a little counter where you could stand up in the back and you can order your little hotdog and your soda and that did it. Let's say once a year, twice a year, you get a chance to go to the beach, your parents take you to the beach. I think about those days--

Red: Um, speaking of the beach, um, do you remember anything about Virginia Key Beach, what made it so special or anything?

Reed: [chuckles] It was very special because it was the only beach we had to go to, really. You're getting ready to pay your toll to go across Rickenbacker and the whites are able to pull off the road anywhere along the way. They're able to pull off the road and, you know, spread their blankets and have a ball. But no, we stayed on that road until you got to that sign that pointed to Virginia Key Beach- that was our only beach that we could go to. But not knowing anything else to compare it to, I thought it was just grand. Right now, today, there is a lady that heads a committee that's fighting to get this Virginia Key Beach up to par. You know, she-- I love-- the lady is Mrs. Athalie Range. I love what she and that committee are doing to bring Virginia Key Beach back. We used to want to go continue across that bridge to Crandon Park. Over there, they had a little train that goes

around, you know, they had a little merry-go-round, everything, and I just wanted to get over there. And a lot of times we want things until you actually get it and you realize you've been wanting all this time-- what you really want, just to say, "I have the right to do so." And to find out what you had all along seemed to have had the most trees, you had the best shade to lay your blanket under. It was really-- it was really nice. I--

P: Why do you think it's so important to preserve Virginia Key Beach? Do you have anything to say to--?

Reed: Not really. Preserve it? Yes, because this was once all we had and I'm quite sure they will have pictures of before and after, and just for them to-- to-- to display this, just for them to display the before and after pictures. Yes, I really cherish this idea of preserving Virginia Key Beach.

S: Well, side-tracking for a minute, what is response to the Miami assassinations in the 1960s starting with President Kennedy?

Reed: It felt like-- I don't know, it's like all-- no, I won't say all hope is gone, because as long as you have breath in your body, you have hope. But it seems as if that we were moving forward, and then the assassination of President Kennedy, and it seems to bring your spirits down. But, there was always somebody else to take, you know, to lead and to keep this fight for civil liberties to keep going. I can remember rioting.

S: Were you a part of the riots?

Reed: No, I was not a part of it. But, I knew it was going on. I'm trying to think the first riot that I knew about-- a motorcycle-- a guy riding a motorcycle. I think he was stopped by the police and he was beaten and his name was Arthur McDuffie, I think was his

name. And he died and the policemen that beat him, they got off and this sparked one riot in Miami. Oh, they were burning anything that they could set a match to.

S: Can you describe what do you remember of 1968 riots in Liberty City?

Reed: Um, was that the year of Arthur McDuffie?

S: Nineteen sixty-eight.

Reed: Yes. That--that--that was-- as I said, they were burning everything that could set a match to. It was just how the black people were expressing themselves. A lot of times, all the burning was done in our area. So, it wasn't, say, the black establishments that were being burned. But now, when it all smolders down, you wondered, did you hurt yourself? No, I didn't look at it as hurting ourselves. I looked at it as making a statement that you're tired of being treated one way and your white brothers and sisters are being treated another way.

P: That same year, Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated. What was your response to it and everyone around you?

Reed: Ooh. They wondered what will happen now. What will happen to the black people now that their leader, Dr. Martin Luther King, has been assassinated? What will happen now? But you can't give up the fight. Martin Luther King did too much for him to die and you let all of his work die. No, that shouldn't-- it gives you more, more spirit. We are going to keep this fight going for Dr. King. I think a lot has been done since his assassination. I don't know had he lived, what more have been done, but I think a lot has been done since the assassination of Dr. King.

Red: I know this tape has been short, but is there one more story about your life you want to share?

Reed: Uh, not really. I look back on those early years and think of, you know, the accomplishments: graduating high school, graduating college, worked in the elementary schools here in Dade County for thirty-three years, look back on the accomplishment of some of my students and I feel good about it. I have one of my students now that's interviewing me, that's a great accomplishment in itself. I am very proud of her and I know she'll continue on and she is going to do great things, I feel very confident about the things that (Shaunticia?) will continue to do.

S: Thank you.

Reed: Alright, and I thank you Pamela, I thank you (Shaunticia?), and I thank you (Wilver?).

S: It was our pleasure.

[audience claps]

END OF INTERVIEW