

Interview with Enid Pinkney

Interviewee: Enid Pinkney: Parents worked on Miami Beach. The Black experience, discrimination

Interviewer: Kathy Hersh

Location: 1001 Ocean Drive, Miami Beach, FL,

Date Recorded: 11/19/11

Kathy Hersh: This is Kathy Hersh interviewing Enid Pinkney on November 19, 2011 at the headquarters of Miami Design Preservation League. Enid, you were telling me about your parents being caretakers of the property of the White family on the Beach at a time when black people were not allowed to overnight there. Could you please describe their employment arrangement and how they operated under these strict kind of rules at the time?

Enid Pinkney: Well, my parents lived on Miami Beach. They lived at 4609 Pinetree Dr. in the servants quarters. Because the people who owned the property were only in Miami during the winter months and they lived in Chicago the rest of the year. So they took care of the property...

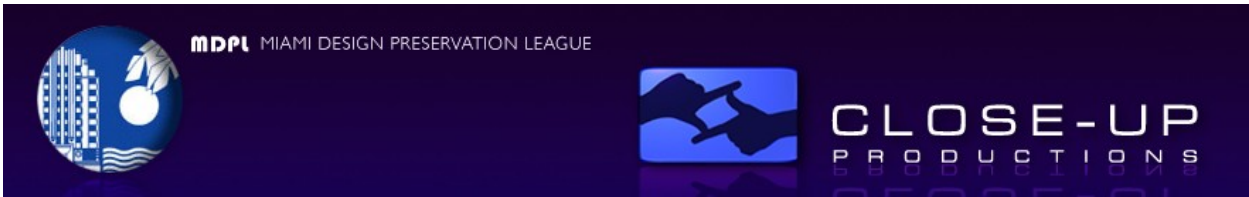
[Interruption]

Kathy Hersh: We'll just start again. Describe your parents and the relationship with this family and the work they did on the Beach.

Enid Pinkney: My parents, my mother and my father, worked for several people but one of the families that stood out was the family of Albert Pick who was a hotel magnate, he owned the Congress Hotel in Chicago and hotels all over the country. And they owned a house at 4609 Pinetree Dr. and my parents, my father was the gardener there, he took of the care of the gardening work and my mother was the maid and she took care of the housekeeping. So that's the work that they did.

Kathy Hersh: And where were you in this time?

Enid Pinkney: I did not live on Miami Beach and go to school on Miami Beach. We had to live in Overtown, where my parents owned a home. And what they did was they asked my grandmother and my



... aunt to move in to the house with us so that we would have adult supervision and we could go to school and live there and just be normal for that period of time because that was during the time of segregation. And so, there was no way that I could live with them and go to school on Miami Beach, so they made arrangements for my grandmother and my aunt to live with us.

Kathy Hersh: So when did you see your parents?

Enid Pinkney: I saw my parents on the weekends when they would come to go to church. That would be it. The other times that I would see them would be when their bosses would come from Chicago and they would want to see us to see how we had grown or just to see us. And that was an exciting time for us. In fact I remember just waiting to get ready to go to Miami Beach.

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And I would wake up in the middle of the night to ask my aunt if was time to get ready and she would say, "No, go back to sleep and I'll wake you when it's time to get up." When it was time my brother and I would get ready and we would go to Miami Beach and we just enjoyed the place. It was so beautiful and there was a fishing pond that they had with goldfish in it and we would love to feed the fish. And then, the Picks would want us to perform. They would want us to sing or say poetry or... But there was one thing my father would not allow us to do and that was to dance. Because that was against his religion. So if they asked us to do that he would say, "No, they can't do that." We would try to show whatever talent we had by reciting poetry and by singing or by doing some kind of dramatization. We really looked forward to going to Miami Beach; it was exciting.

Kathy Hersh: What did it look like then? Quite a bit different than now, I imagine.

Enid Pinkney: Well we had to go across the Causeway, and that was exciting. To go over the bridge to get there and then the beauty; the manicured lawns and the beauty of the houses. We just thought it was like heaven, going to Miami Beach.

Kathy Hersh: And you got all dressed up?

Enid Pinkney: We got all dressed up and we were looking our best and we were on our best behavior. We had to be on her best behavior.



And we just wanted to do the right thing whatever was right we had to do it.

Kathy Hersh: So it sounds like there was some personal aspect to the relationship your father had with the Picks, if they wanted to see the children.

Enid Pinkney: Yes, yes it was a good relationship. They trusted my parents with their valuables. They left everything there. And when they came back everything was just as they left it. They left all of their liquor. They left their China, their silver, everything. Everything they had in the house was there. That was one of the things that made them so valuable. And my father knew that Mr. Pick respected him. In fact, one time my father... he was also a minister. He was a minister but also a gardener. One night when he was coming back from church -- he was pastoring a church in Carver Ranches, which is now called West Park -- and the police stopped him and told him he was driving with bright lights and ordered him out of the car. So my father got out of the car and he had his hat on. The police told my father to take his hat off. My father wanted to know why he had to take his hat off. My father was born in the Bahamas. So he had to go to citizenship school to become a citizen of the United States. And he had studied the Constitution. He was an expert on the Constitution. And he would sit us around the table when we were together and go over the Constitution with us because he would say we were born in this country and we should understand the laws of the country -- we should understand the Constitution. So he asked the policeman what law in the Constitution was he violating by keeping his hat on. And the policeman was incensed that that this black man would ask him such a question. So he took his hand and he knocked my father's hat off. He took his hand back like that and hit him and knocked his hat off his head off and fell to the ground. My father stooped down picked up his hat and put it back on his head. And he told him, "This is the last black but you're going to slap."

[10:00]

And so the police was really outraged then that he would talk to him like that and so he said, "You are going to jail because you do not respect a policeman." My father said, "Fine. You take me to jail and I have one call -- telephone call to make -- and it's going to be to Mr. Albert Pick and he's going to see that you are fired." So they spoke to my mother to try to get my father calmed down and he said, "Don't speak to her, she has nothing



to do with this. You deal with me. You take me to jail." They took him in the car and took him away and left us on State Road 9, in the dark. We didn't know how we were going to get home. But my brother could drive and he said he would drive us home. My mother said, "No, because you do not have any license, and if the cops stop you, then you're dead wrong." So, we're out there, in the dark, on State Road 9 waiting for whatever to happen. When we looked we saw a police car coming back and stopped across from us and we looked and it was my father in the backseat. And these same two policemen, they asked my mother if she could calm my father down and he said the same thing again, "Do not speak to her." And they said that they would let him go if he would acknowledge that he was disrespectful, and apologize. My father said, "For what? You slapped me. You knocked my hat off. I'm not apologizing." By this time my mother is really disgusted because she wants to leave. We been there all this time. All she wanted him to do was say what they wanted him to say and let's go. But he refused. And they finally let him go. But I think that Mr. Pick had something to do with that because my father knew that Mr. Pick would stand up for him and would defend him whatever he needed done he would do it because he was such a loyal employee. He just knew that he would come to his defense. So the relationship was good and it back in that day it was good pay and I look upon it as a good experience, even though it was during the days of segregation. It did have some good features in that experience because you have the loyalty of the employer and the loyalty of the employee.

Kathy Hersh: Now you told me that your brother was actually born in that house on Miami Beach. Why is that not recorded as his birthplace?

Enid Pinkney: Well they just refuse to do that. When he was born in 1933 in the servants' quarters, Mrs. Alberta Turner was the midwife and Dr. William Sawyer (who were both black), was the doctor, came to the house but when Dr. Sawyer went to record the birth they refused -- the Bureau of Vital Statistics of Miami Florida -- refused to put Miami Beach on the birth certificate because no black person was supposed to have been born on Miami Beach. So his birth certificate was never correct. He died with Miami, Florida on his birth certificate because they refused to put Miami Beach on his birth certificate.



Kathy Hersh: You were telling a story earlier about your brother coming over to work with your father one day. Would you tell that story again about your brother and the bus and what happened?

Enid Pinkney: Well, on certain days when my father had a lot of work to do he would ask my brother to come over and help him with the gardening work.

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My brother was a Boy Scout. So, on this particular day he had to go to Boy Scout meeting first and then he told him to catch the bus and my brother was a Boy Scout so on this particular day and come to spend the night so he could be there early the next morning to begin working. So my brother did that. He caught the bus from Overtown to Miami Beach and he got off the bus. When he got off the bus the police stopped him and asked him where was he going so he said that he was going to his father. And he said, "Where is your father." And he said, "4609 Pinetree Dr." So they told him to get in the car and they put my brother in the police car and drove to 4609 Pinetree Dr. Drove him to 4609 Pinetree Drive where my parents were. And they asked my parents was he supposed to be there and they said yes he supposed to be here because he's going to work for us. And so that was the way they let him go. The police during that day were very suspicious of any black person walking around on Miami Beach. They wanted to know where you were going and what you were going to do. They were really on their job as far as they were concerned. With knowing what black people were doing on Miami Beach because that was not the common saying unless you were working.

Kathy Hersh: And these weren't actual laws, I understand. This was just an understanding? Is that true?

Enid Pinkney: There was an ordinance that said they had to have a police card and that was another thing, my brother did not have a police card. But that was not just for black people that was for anybody that was working on Miami Beach. So even though there were laws that say what time they had to be off the beach it was just a common understanding.

Kathy Hersh: There weren't laws about a curfew?

Enid Pinkney: There weren't laws about a curfew. But it was like a common understanding that black people shouldn't be on Miami Beach



after dark. And that was because of the harassment. Other servants who didn't live on Miami Beach probably could stay after dark and not be harassed, but if a black person was there, they would be stopped. In fact, black people would be stopped day or night to check on why they were there.

Kathy Hersh: Even during the day?

Enid Pinkney: Even during the day. My brother was stopped during the day.

Kathy Hersh: And do you remember, did he react about that? Was he upset about it?

Enid Pinkney: No, no because during that time that was expected that was the norm so you just accepted what was. Because he knew he was going to his father he knew he was telling the truth and if they were going to take him there, he would see his father.

Kathy Hersh: So when you came over for your annual visit with the Pick family, I'm presuming you didn't go to the beach afterwards and have a picnic?

Enid Pinkney: Oh, no. No, no.

Kathy Hersh: So black people were not allowed on the sand on Miami Beach, correct?

Enid Pinkney: No, no, but you know we went out there... We did go out just to lounge around. And I remember just rolling in the grass. Just rolling in the grass. Of course I think there were some bugs or something in there because I started itching, afterwards.

[20:00]

And another thing that was exciting, they used to have the boat parades on Miami Beach where the boats would be decorated and we would be invited to see that, and that was exciting. Just to see all the lights on the boats, the decorations on the boats as they passed by the house and went up, wherever they were going.

Kathy Hersh: So you went to the Pinetree house to see that?

Enid Pinkney: Yes we went whenever... That was sometime around Christmas, I believe it was, when they would have the boat parade.



Kathy Hersh: So the family, presumably, would be down here during that time?

Enid Pinkney: Yes and they would invite us to come.

Kathy Hersh: And that was on the Intracoastal.

Enid Pinkney: Yes.

Kathy Hersh: So that was a big deal.

Enid Pinkney: That was another big deal.

Kathy Hersh: So where so where did black people go to the beach in those days?

Enid Pinkney: To work.

Kathy Hersh: Where did they go for beach experience, recreation experience?

Enid Pinkney: Well, at one point there was no place in Miami-Dade County and they had to go to Broward County. And then there was the Virginia Key Beach, back in the '40s, around '43. There was a protest at Haulover Beach to try to get beach experience for black people and they didn't want them at Haulover so they gave them Virginia Key beach.

Kathy Hersh: Were you very much aware of that at the time?

Enid Pinkney: Yes, yes.

Kathy Hersh: So did you then go to Virginia Key beach?

Enid Pinkney: Yes.

Kathy Hersh: And describe what that was like?

Enid Pinkney: That was nice. Yeah, that was nice. I enjoyed going to Virginia Key beach.

Kathy Hersh: Was it an equivalent kind of experience?

Enid Pinkney: Yes, it was. You know they had Crandon Park, and, what they did, they duplicated it because they had the merry-go-round and then they had the train and the things that they had over at



Crandon Park, they duplicated them at over at Virginia Key beach. So that was another excitement. And people had picnics there. Churches had picnics. Families had picnics. It was a good experience.

Kathy Hersh: When the laws changed and people, everyone, was allowed -- discrimination was not allowed on the beach did -- you come then to Miami Beach to enjoy the beach, or did you just day with Virginia Key Beach.

Enid Pinkney: No, I wasn't interested.

Kathy Hersh: You didn't have an attachment.

Enid Pinkney: No, no.

Kathy Hersh: Is there anything else that you recall that I didn't ask you about that is worth mentioning about your family's past association with the Beach?

Enid Pinkney: I think as we look back and see the changes, because I remember when I became older and was involved in Dade Heritage Trust and they had a meeting on Miami Beach at the Bath Club. I think that was it. Yes. And they asked me to speak. I couldn't help but remember what a difference that was in my experience of the beach. From the days of segregation to being asked to speak at the Bath Club. So we have gone through quite a few changes from the time I experienced Miami Beach from back in the '30s, to today. But I think that it's good that this is being recorded because people do not realize what it was like. People do not realize the humiliation and how people were treated and this isn't even among black people. I think there are lessons to learn and I think as both black and white people respect the history, that they have lived over the years, and transferred this history to the younger generation so they can understand whose shoulders they are standing on. And this is what I think is missing. So I think that is why this experience of telling the story is so valuable to everyone. Because, we need to know our past so that we can appreciate where we are today and we will not make the mistakes we made in the past in the future.

Kathy Hersh: Well that's what this archive is all about. That's what we're trying to do. So thank you very much.



Kathy Hersh: Growing up black in Miami, I'm wondering whether you as a child were aware of the prejudice or is it just 'childhood.' Were you aware of discrimination as a child?

Enid Pinkney: Yes.

Kathy Hersh: Tell me how.

Enid Pinkney: I was aware of discrimination as a child because if I had to go to the store, let's say Burdines or some store downtown, they would and let's out what to buy some shoes, they didn't want me to try on the shoes in the store. Now I can take the shoes home, try them on bring them back but I couldn't sit where everybody else -- where whites were sitting -- to try on shoes. Or if I went... I had an experience -- we had a store here, Hartley's, I bought dresses. I had some money and I went to buy some clothes. They did want to try the clothes on. We had colored and white fountains -- the sign said black it. Black people drink from the colored fountain, white people drink from the white fountain. You had to sit in the back of the bus. There is no way that you're not going to know that there was segregation. It was all over you. There were signs everywhere. In the train, even when I went to college, they put black people in the first car and they said the reason for that is if the train got in a wreck we'd be the first to get hurt. So there were so many things that made you aware that there was segregation and that black people were treated differently from white people.

Kathy Hersh: Were there signs on the Beach, "no blacks allowed." Do you remember? There certainly were signs of about "no Jews." There was a period of time, quite ironic now, when Jews were not allowed to live above Fifth Street. Do remember seeing any signs?

Enid Pinkney: Well I don't remember seeing the signs because when I went there I went straight to where I was going and we went to a designated place and we usually went by car so... But I know there were signs around. Everybody knew that there were signs.

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