

# Karen Mays-Terry Interview Transcript

My name is Karen Renee Mays-Terry. I am 58 years old. I am a native Austinite. I have lived in this neighborhood my entire life.

I actually grew up at 2501 Weber Avenue, which is a street over. Then when I got married, we bought a home on Maple Avenue, 2007. So I'm still in the neighborhood of my birth, so to speak.

My parents actually bought their home on Weber in 1958, and it's a totally different structure now than it was then because they did add on to it twice. But, this neighborhood has a lot of wonderful memories for me. My college professors live in this neighborhood. My college president's backyard intersects my parent's backyard. So I knew everybody, including the owners of the home where I'm being interviewed.

This is such a special neighborhood of people that have a lot of wisdom, a lot of care, a lot of love. A lot of my friends thought we were crazy when we actually moved into a house whose backyard intersect my parent's front yard.

Again, it was just a double dose of everything. It was either a double dose of correction, it was a double dose of love, care and concern. When my daughter was catching the bus, going to school, I never worried about anything because there was always somebody on the porch that was able to say, "hey, you're on your way home, or at least call me."

She has a maid at home. So, you know, there's a difference between living in an area and a neighborhood. And this is the Rogers Washington area is the perfect example of a neighborhood.

I see a neighborhood being defined as people that work together, people that actually care about each other. You get to know each other's families. You grow up together. You know each other on a first name basis. You can knock on the door you visit. You can ask for favors. You babysit.

I mean, it's just a continuation of family. Professionally and as a family.

We had quite a few traditions. Every year we had a big Christmas party in one of the neighbors' houses where we celebrated each other.

Also, we took Easter pictures outside of the doors of each other's family. We had a picnic every year that usually is held at the end of May. We celebrated baby showers, birthday parties,

wedding showers. So, most of the kids, including myself, attended Huston Tillotson and graduated. So we had two parties.

I remember when I graduated from Huston Tillotson way back in 1987. The whole neighborhood turned out, and they were all at my graduation. And then my parents had a big graduation party and everybody was there. So people were inside the house, outside the house, in the street. When we have the neighborhood watch, the street that I actually grew up on, wherever, it's a circle and that's where my backyard intersects. So everybody's in the circle. So we have that every year. So it's been quite a few things that we have annually.

Being born in 1966, at the, in the middle of integration, I guess maybe I was in first grade right. Oh, God, that's a long time ago. About 1973, '74 is when bussing actually started. So I'm not of the generation that got to go to the original Anderson. I went to the new Anderson. But I did attend Campbell Elementary School, not the Campbell up the street, but the Campbell that is on Chicon that is now Garza.

So most of the people out of this area went to that Campbell. They were very excited when they built Campbell right across the street here. In fact, the neighborhood association, when Campbell first started, donated the school bell up there and were very instrumental in tutoring because most of the neighbors here were educators, either in the collegiate field or public schools.

So, my sister, who lived also on Givens, taught at Campbell. We've done Easter egg hunts up at Campbell and have a real good relationship with them. But the generation of people that graduated in the '80, we were bussed cross town. I attended Murchison Junior High, which is Murchison Middle School now, and the new Anderson High School.

At that time, the principal of Anderson, Dr. Charles Akins, actually is an Austinite and went to the old Anderson with my mom. So a lot of the still the community feeling was there. Now the boundaries have changed again. Kealing in the '70s was closed and they reopened Kealing, which made everybody in the neighborhood happy because again, now we have a middle school back in the community.

And my daughter actually went to the magnet school at Kealing. So I wish that I could have had the Kealing, the old Anderson experience, like a lot of my other neighbors, like Stuart King is, is ahead of me. In fact we caught the bus right across the street, and was bussed across town.

Being able to attend different things before school at Anderson, because Anderson is so far away. So my father had a good time then. I think about Scooby and all of that, he had the same look.

And so he would pick up the kids in the area and take us out so that we could participate. So it wasn't a competition as far as grades, but I guess just being a part of everything.

My family is of the Baptist faith. I know a lot of our neighbors are either United Methodist or African Methodist Episcopal. We attended Greater Mount Zion Baptist Church, which is over by the well at that time, over by the original Kealing. If we didn't go to church on Sunday, I was sick, I didn't feel good, you could do anything else. So I always managed to make myself get to church, so if I wanted to go to the movies or I wanted to go to my friend's house or ride my bike, unfortunately now with kids that have all the telephone gadgets and and video games, you don't see a lot of bike riding and and visiting on the porches and stuff because people are sitting in front of the TV.

But there was a lot of that at that time. And so if we didn't go to church on Sunday, then you're in the house the whole entire time. So I know a lot of people in this area either went to Greater Mount Zion or David Chapel right up the street.

I know Ms. Marshall and her family went to Ebenzer. Doctor King's family went to Wesley. So yes, religion is very, very important.

In fact, on the street that I grew up on Weber, somebody got the great idea to put a basketball goal up. Well, unfortunately, the basketball goal was in front of my parents' driveway. So all times at night, people are playing basketball and all of that.

And so my daddy actually went outside one day and took the basketball goal down and told them all, "go to the park, this is not the park."

But, you know, we meet up at each other's house, go to Alamo Park and Play, go to Rosewood. At one time it was a lot of that. You did have to be home at a certain time.

We walked everywhere. We'd get together to go back to the store. There was a store down at the railroad tracks. The store that intersects Manor and Stafford the other way. And that's a change, you don't see people doing that as much anymore, because a lot of the kids that go to Campbell don't actually live anymore in this area.

The Holy Cross part, which is the part of the neighborhood association – because my mom, Joyce May, used to be one of the presidents – Holy Cross, it was a hospital there. And Holy Cross Hospital, occupied the area where L.L. Campbell is.

So the neighborhood behind us, I think Givens might have been a part of it. I'm not sure, because all of these streets are named after different people. I found out Weber, which is the street that I grew up on, was actually named after white doctor that serviced a lot of African-American people at Holy Cross Hospital.

So he was Dr. Weber. And Givens, the street that's right behind this house, was an African-American dentist. So a lot of these streets are named after a tree. Cedar, Maple,

chestnut, walnut. So that's where the Holy Cross Park came up, because that neighborhood was called the Holy Cross addition.

These are traditional ranch style homes. I know when you look at homes that are being built now as opposed to then it was a big deal to have a dining room. You actually ate in the dining room, which was separate from the living room. And, now the house that we bought does not have a separate living room, dining room, but the other houses, a lot of the other houses do. With everybody's home being the same, sets up different traditions.

If you have a dining room then everybody eats together in the dining room. Now the trend is the family room. Everybody eats with the TV and everything. Well, there was no place to put a TV in the dining room. So as opposed to eating and looking at TV, you ate together and you talk to each other.

So that's something that I always appreciated. When people entertained you set the table up and everything in the dining room. So you stood around the table again and you entertain and you talk to one another in the dining room. So that's it. To me, that's an important part of the structure of the way the houses were built together at that time.

Well, we call it a ditch that ran through, starting on \_\_\_\_\_, which is a couple of streets over closer to Manor Road, through Weber, our street across here.

But all of that has been filled in now. So a lot of times we get to places a little quicker because I already said we were either moving on foot or we were moving on a bike. You jump down off into the ditch, which you call the creek or whatever, if there wasn't anything in there and you would see somebody popping up from the ditch.

So that was one of the things, my mother, if we were riding bikes on the street and let's just say I decide we're gonna go wherever, take the street. I'm one of the kids that would pop down in there. And you know, it's a dry time, there's not a lot of rain in there. But instead, that allowed us, instead of walking all the way around, you just cut straight through. So that was a part of life for us in this neighborhood as well.

There were so many influential ladies that I grew up and admired. Ms. Marshall, who still lived across the street, she and her husband, Doctor Marshall, he was my college math professor.

My mom, Mary Hurst, even Ms. Gussie was a part who owned this home. Ms. Kirk, Willie Mae Kirk, who was an East Austin advocate, she was also an educator. Irene Thompson, Ms. Betty Washington, the Kings'. A lot of influential people participated in the neighborhood association. They met together in each other's homes.

We go out now and meet in different places, but that was part of it. They met in each other's homes in the dining room and everything, which gave them a chance to come together and talk.

Ms. Hicks. I mean, God, just just so many other little ladies. Brenda. Brenda Mims, who lived across the street from us.

Her parents were educators as well. And that holds a lot of fond memories.

One of the things that everybody looked forward to was the neighborhood picnic. And so the neighborhood picnic started off in different people's backyards before it got so big that we started going to Alamo Rec Center.

The people in the neighborhood not only got a chance to come, but then you could invite others. And so other people from throughout the city looked forward to where we got to have a picnic. So all you had to do was bring your own table and chairs. People's yards, backyards, front yards would be full of different people with food and everything.

And we'd be celebrating and eating in the yards. So that's one memory.

Irene Thompson was one of the ladies that gave me the shower, both bridal and baby showers. And we're also in the same sorority, we're all AKA women – Alpha Kappa Alpha. Some of the ladies, like Miss Washington, was a member of Delta Sigma Theta, sorority.

Ms. Marshall is a member of Zeta Phi Beta sorority. So then you also had the Greek life. Different colors, same mission and everything. But then again, that's a little competition – who's sorority. And of course, everybody knows, AKA is the best.

I brought pictures of my family. My parents actually bought that home that is still there in 1958. So this is them. This is Lester Mays and this is Joyce Mays on that wonderful day, September 3rd, 1955, when they got married.

They met at Huston Tillotson, which is over on Chicon and a historically black College. This is them in their later life, so you can see what they look like. Of course, I look like my mom. My sister wanted us to show this picture because that's, of course, on the other side of the house. But that was us in high school with them. Of course, I still look the same.

I guess the value of these houses, the cost, when my parents bought that house, they bought it for \$7,000.

As I said, they met over Huston Tillotson. My dad was a PE major. My mom was a homemaking major. They were both educators. So my dad was from Round Rock, Texas. My mom was from Austin. In fact, she grew up over off of 12th and Alamo is where she lived. So, they got married and everything.

And for a while they live, because Austin at that time was segregated. So they both were secondary majors. So you only had one at African American high school. You had lots of

elementary schools. So they taught in a town called Flatonia. And then my mother got a job out west at Coleman. So the only time they would come home was during the summer.

So they bought that house. And just to know that my father, taught during the year, drove a cab, bartended, to get that house and to keep that house. And then my dad was a special ed coordinator in Austin Independent School District.

In fact, he was the first vocational adjustment coordinator, which is the person that gets jobs for, kids that have mental and physical disabilities. So he was the supervisor of that program, and my mother taught special ed at Lanier High School. So he also worked at Huston Tillotson as the Upward Bound assistant supervisor.

So a lot of the kids from the neighborhood went Upward Bound. But just to know how hard they worked to keep and maintain that home, that was such a pride to them that they paid either six, seven, or eight thousand – one of those three numbers for our home – is really something.

At that time, like right now, I guess the big push is for everyone lives in Pflugerville in Round Rock, this was the next upcoming area. My grandmother lived over off of Chestnut and 12th, so that area was already saturated. You have to remember too it was segregation at that time. So you couldn't go all over the place.

So as different areas opened up, and at that time, I guess this was the new area that opened up because I know 80% of the people that lived here at that time were African-American educators.

It was in the late 70s, early '80s. My grandmother lived in an old neighborhood that her street was actually paved. I mean, that sounds so crazy now, the streets over here were paved, but there were no sidewalks. So it has been in my lifetime that the sidewalks out here in front of Jen's house and in front of mine. I remember the sidewalks being put in. Even now, there were no bike lanes and all of that, that's been within the past five years.

From my childhood on, it was always paved streets. But, yes, the sidewalks they put in.

One of the things that I have been a part of is the historic designation of this neighborhood. A lot of influential people, community servants have come out of this neighborhood. And gentrification is driving us out at a rapid rate.

And the history of African-Americans in Austin is rapidly disappearing. And it's very important to remember and be remembered for different contributions that have been made to the city by people of color. As I said, the whole street, Givens, was named after an African-American dentist, the only one. And he was also a community activist in East Austin.

So those kinds of things, that kind of history is being lost. L.L. Campbell was another East Hartford activist, preacher at Ebenezer Baptist Church. A lot of the African-American churches

belong to the Saint John Association. And right where Highland Mall is and all of that. He was one of the founders of the Saint John Orphanage.

Now, my connection to that is my grandmother, who grew up in Bastrop, went to school there. So with my 58 year old self, I have knowledge of that because she talked about it.

Neighborhoods change. I am glad for and accept the diversity that's coming to the neighborhood, it's important the starting of a new history. But it's also important that the history that was already established not be forgotten.

Allison Terry, my daughter, and Allie's very proud to be able to teach, she teaches physical education in a school named after someone that she actually knew. He meant what he said. So I knew that he meant that he would have a conversation with my father, which I didn't want.

So I was, from that day on, I was there in class on time.

When I was in the fourth grade, I went to the original Campbell. Ms. Lynch, who was my fourth grade teacher, lived down the street that I currently live on, Maple. And I had gotten into a little skirmish with the kid at school and in the classroom and used some naughty language that I shouldn't have in my anger before I got home.

So Ms. Lynch did turn me in. I remember getting into a little skirmish outside on the street with another kid and my neighbor, the Hurst family – Mary Hurst was like my godmother and her kids were like big brothers and big sisters to us, Tracy and Cynthia.

And Tracy was looking out the window, and she had already got on the phone to call my mom and told her how I was acting outside. So you don't appreciate those things when you're a kid. I wish they'd mind their own business.

But when you get older again, the many hands and the many eyes, I'm almost now getting emotional, that make you the person that you are and especially being an educator, particularly a school counselor. You realize the importance of people pouring into your life in a positive way.

Because Ali is 31, so she still also got a lot of benefits from being in the community of people that she knew. I taught in Mendez and Mendez is out in south east Austin.

So it was exactly, because I clocked it once for my car, 14 miles from my door to Mendez. So, at that time Allison was going to McCallum High School, and so she would get home before I would, that same bus I took to Anderson – because the boundaries have changed, now the kids from the neighborhood go to McCallum – let her off right here.

So my neighbors would be outside and my neighbor, God brother, big brother, Doug Hurst, works from home. So if he was outside in the yard or whatever, he knew exactly what time she

should be arriving and if she was late or whatever, and I was still at school, he would call me.

“It's whatever o'clock and Allison hasn't come up the hill. Does she have basketball practice today? Does she have another practice today?”

So again, those eyes are watching. A couple of times when Allison missed the bus to come home, she called him to pick her up. At that time, he didn't have a car, so he went to the neighbor that was like an auntie that lived next door to me, who was retired, another retired educator, Lola Fowler.

“Can I use your car to pick up Allison? Allison told me she missed the bus.”

He drove in Lola's car to go pick up my daughter. I had no idea she missed a bus.

I got home, she said, “I missed the bus today.”

I said, “you did? But how did you get home?”

“Uncle Doug picked me up.”

So those are the kind of things that makes a neighborhood, as opposed to just somewhere that you live. When she was at Kealing and Kealing had a walkout, I can't remember what the issue is, and kids were making a stand and they had a walkout.

So they left school and walked to the Capitol. Well, he was working at Ebenezer there that afternoon, and he called me and said, these kids are coming down 11th Street from Kealing, if I see Allison, you want me to grab her and take her back to school. So again, there's the neighborhood stepping in, watching out for your kid.

Lola Fowler, who I brought up, who lives next door to the house that I live in on Maple, had a pool installed in her backyard, and I remember her talking to my mom, and they talked about the pool and everything. She welcomed all the kids. She said, the kids in this area, because Alamo Park doesn't have a pool, need to have a place where they can go and swim.

So all you had to do was to knock on the door, let her know you were going to be with the pool, and you know, if it was okay with your parents or whatever. And of course, they always sat out and watched. You could swim in the pool. So I live right next door to someone that I could go and swim or put my feet in in the water.

Now my daughter swims like a fish. I don't swim, so that's the irony of it. I cannot swim, but she swims like a fish, and I could sit next to her and keep my feet in the water. So those are the kind of people and the neighborhood connections that we had.



Our neighbors now that we've gotten to know, Jen right here, are wonderful because a lot of the same traditions have continued. We still have the neighborhood round up and everything. People have joined the Rogers Washington Neighborhood Association, so we still have that connection.

And again, we met new wonderful people that are not only making new neighborhood memories, Jen let me come here and be filmed, but also it's important to them to maintain and let everyone know about the history that was already established.

And that's a good feeling because times change, situations change. But the history is still there.

I want this neighborhood to be remembered as homesteads of people that were eager to start their careers in a segregated society. Have homes and raise their children in a middle class environment with a sense of family, a sense of community. Also the work that they've done in the community, to be remembered and continued. And even though a lot of them have moved on to glory, no longer here with us physically, that the works, their concerns and the changes and contributions that they made to not only East Austin – Austin – be remembered.

In the Oak Springs area down off of airport, when I grew up it was Oak Springs Library. Now it's the Willie Mae Kirk library. You know Willie Mae Kirk lived right down the street, in fact, right next door to Marilyn Webb. So Ms. Kirk was another Austin educator. She taught at Rosewood elementary school. They did a lot of things for the East Austin community. And so why is this library the Willie Mae Kirk Library?

Well, Willie Mays Kirk was an instrumental piece in East Austin advocacy. When she passed away, I know they had an estate sale. I know I personally bought a piece of art that's in my house right now that represents the divine nine, the African-American sororities and fraternities.

I also bought a pearl bracelet. Now, Ms. Kirk was a member of Delta Sigma Theta, and she and I always, she always said, "you pledged the wrong color."

But at that time, I was a teacher at Bertha Sadler Means Leadership Academy, which is a school primarily made up of black and brown girls, from another East Austin advocate, Ms. Bertha Means.

And I wore that bracelet on the first day of school to just remind myself about educators that have gone on but made an impact in Austin. So that's what I want for people to remember about the neighborhood.