

# Patricia Calhoun Interview Transcript

Patrishia Calhoun, my parents were TC and Thelma Calhoun.

My dad's name was Theodore. but most people called him TC, and, as I mentioned, my mother's name was Selma. We were all C's, both of them were TCC and I'm PCC. So without design, it just happened that we all had or each of us had C as a middle name.

Actually, lived as a permanent day to day resident just since 2016. When my parents built the house in 1959-60, we actually moved again in the spring of 1960, and I was a senior in high school. So I was preparing to go to college. And there was a summer program, summer orientation, and my dad loved to drive.

He usually drove everywhere. And so we left shortly after moving into this house. I went to Michigan State, and so he drove to East Lansing. And, from that point on, college, I come home, of course, summers, holidays, not always Christmas usually, but, other holidays. It was a little expensive and pricey to come home for every holiday, so frequently I stayed on campus but was always here for Christmas, of course.

And, once I graduated from college, I lived in Chicago for a while, and then Detroit and finally got tired of shoveling snow and driving with shovels and kitty litter and such in my trunk so I could shovel in to my house and shovel out to the drive in and decided it was time to come back to Texas, to some warm weather.

And so I moved back. I was employed with a factory in the Dallas area, and so I was only here for a couple of years before I moved to Dallas, and I had been in that area in Carrollton, until my mother passed away. And that was 2015. And so we had always planned to come back.

But we just missed it by a couple of years, and it was too late to bring her back. Her health failed, but she was 103, so she enjoyed a good, good life. Of course, when you're as old as I am you're going to lose a parent typically. But, there's something about losing your mom that's different from losing your dad.

Not sure what that is, but you always miss that presence. But, in any case, we had both planned to move back here, but it just didn't happen that way. So I came on back in 2016, so full circle. you could see mom. I think she looks really pink from this. Isn't that, when she looked up, it kind of did.

As I mentioned, I did not grow up in this neighborhood, so I grew up in the neighborhood that's just off San Bernard and Comal. So I lived on Cotton Street, which runs, very short street

between Comal and San Bernard.

It runs over to Navasota, I believe. And so that's where I spent my childhood. I went to Blackshear Elementary School, and Mr. Rice was our principal. I just recall little bits and pieces, because that was back in the early '50s. He had brought in a lunch program, so we had naps and we had snacks and, we had a great library and a great art department.

We had our own kiln firing, too, and did ceramics, which was unusual for that time.

Most of the students that I was in Blackshear with were not in this neighborhood. There were some that were in my old neighborhood where I grew up. And many of them are in different, different locations, thank you.

And of course, being the time that it was, there are fewer and fewer of us every year, but I went through all of the black schools because integration hadn't taken place when I was in school.

It was good. I went through Kealing. One of the things that I do remember – Kealing at that time was seventh, eighth and ninth. And I think tenth, eleventh, and twelfth was high school. And, when we reached the ninth grade, they decided to change. And so, when we reached the eighth grade, and I have to stop and think which way that went.

But the net of it is we had to remain in Kealing an extra year. And so we were all, you know, of course, very disappointed because we weren't going to high school. So in any case, when we finally did, Anderson was a fairly new structure at that time. And, again, it was all African American. Some of my family, in fact, Yvettes, the Crawfords – my mom's sister married a Crawford, so that's how we're related. They were teachers at Anderson. Both of them.

Many of the teachers I knew, through the years, many had been teachers at the junior high as well, and transferred to the high school. So I knew most of them before I went to Anderson and, and they all knew me because they knew my dad and my mom.

So it was all through school. It was a little different because you hear of the preacher's kid, the "PK's." I was the principal's daughter. And so there's a certain amount of expectations that you feel you have to live up to. And that's kind of followed me through school. So I know you were the principal's daughter.

Well, in junior high, three of us decided to – we were in the band in junior high. And one of my friends was a bass player – female. And then the other friend played a brass instrument.

I played the vibraphone, so I wanted to play the harp. That was my dream. I wanted a harp. And, I'm kind of rambling here because one thing leads to another, but I think that was my first year in junior high. Yes. Because we were going into the band, so we went shopping.

At that time, the music store was J.R. Reed, and that was on Congress Avenue, and they had all the different instruments in that as well as music and that sort of thing. And so my mom and dad took me and we priced the harps. And so I ended up with the vibraphone. That's a keyboard, kind of like a piano. And I had been taking piano lessons forever. It seemed.

And so I don't remember the conversation and how my dad switched my thoughts from the harp to a vibraphone, but that's what we left with it. So, I continued that in high school, but the three of us got together and decided we'd play a few of the popular tunes at the time.

They weren't really jazz, they were kind of old standards. We did that for just a little bit less, wasn't anything that we became a trio or anything like that.

But where I grew up, there were always people coming through town, because again, as educators, the State Teachers Association for African Americans was headquartered here in Austin. And so they would have their conferences, state conferences, excuse me, so forth. And so there were always people coming through for meetings, various meetings, etc..

And, you've heard of the Green Book? There were no hotels. So typically the residents opened their homes to those who were coming in town for meetings and such. And so I do remember, when I lived on Cotton, there was always somebody coming through town. And there were particularly the principals around the state that my dad, they were close friends.

The neighborhood was really a kind of a close, cohesive neighborhood because I guess the commonalities was education, and either Huston Tillotson University – College at that time – or the lower level schools, the high school, junior high, elementary.

U.T. had started to open up a little bit, but this neighborhood was largely, probably up to Huston Tillotson. I think in later years, professors at the university began coming into the city.

Much as we have now, it was very active. One of the interesting things about the neighborhood, they all knew each other very well. And I would say more than acquaintances, they were all essentially friends. There were some that were closer friends than others, but most had known each other for many, many years.

I used to tease my mother. I said, "the strange thing about you guys is you don't visit one another. You talk on the phone and everybody knows what everybody's doing, and you come together for different events, but you don't visit."

I don't know why that was, but pretty much it was just occasional visits. But, not like you see on TV or you think about people being if they're as close friends as they were, that they're in each other's kitchens all the time.

But that wasn't the case, yet they were all close.

I would guess this is a conversation that I don't remember being a part of with my parents. I don't know how it came to be that they chose this neighborhood, but there weren't that many to choose from, number one, to build a new home.

I do remember, as I was in high school, some of my friends had moved to McKinley Heights, which I don't know if you're familiar, just across MLK and towards airport and I wanted to move to McKinley Heights because my friends were over there. And they had left the neighborhood Cotton, where I grew up.

But this land belonged to, which you've probably read the history of, Rogers Washington, to a dentist, a medical professional who was African-American. Part of it. There's this section, and then where the cul de sac is, is the builder section, and so this section was divided into lots, and I have no idea how my dad chose this area.

But, my dad was a very outgoing person. He never met a stranger, so he could go somewhere, and by the time he left, he was buddies with half the people there.

So I'm just guessing that he knew the family who owned the land here or knew of them, and knew that they had determined that they would divide the property into parcels of land. And so they made the decision to build here. But I was not a part of that conversation or probably was not even interested that much because I was in high school and all the activities of being a senior in high school, that was where my focus was.

Design. That is, each home was more of the desire and the design and the owners. The other part, which is more Holy Cross Heights, if I'm not mistaken, was a development and I think, if I remember correctly, LaVonne Marshall mentioning that it was a subdivision, but like you are able to do now, you could personalize your home. You had maybe 3 or 4 choices of plans, but you could make some changes, those plans.

And so you'll see a similar house, duplicated in the Holy Cross section. And in this section, was more either architectural plans, either architects designed for that particular resident, or in the case of my parents, my mom chose the plan. It was, and I don't know how she found it or where she found it, but I do remember her saying that it was a California plan.

And so the house was built according to those architectural plans. So that would be the difference between the Rogers section and the Holy Cross section. We still don't know a lot about Rogers. And, I think there's ongoing research to determine who exactly Rogers was.

That process had started when I moved, and I was excited about the process because one of the concerns we had about the neighborhood, of course, was the turnover of the properties and the changing of the style of architecture, the style of home being built. Also, the fact that this had remained a really cohesive community and many of the original homeowners were still here, we

were just concerned about losing the flavor of this community.

It represented, I think, of what East Austin used to be in terms of just a complete, cohesive community. Yes there were differences, economic differences as well, but because we were segregated and we could not go across the freeways, we call it, we built our own and the communities thrived, our businesses thrived.

And so we could see that Austin was losing that. And particularly on the Eastside. One of the things I remember, several of us, in conversation, it was the feeling that in a very short time it was like you never existed. So the whole face of the community – and it is different. But unless we took steps to preserve our stories and our histories, then in a few years, the Eastside of Austin and the African-American families who inhabited this part of town would be totally gone. And it was like you were never here.

So it became really important to us – this is one of the few, probably one of the last communities that still had a fair number of original homeowners and, and the stories behind each family. So it was important for us. It was a lot of hard work. It took about five years of research and rewriting and discussions and, and it continues on as we try to uncover additional information.

One of the things that we're still researching is the existence of an African American credit union. That was very much instrumental in providing funding for the homeowners. And, so that's one of the things that's ongoing.

It was headquartered in the Chase building on Navasota that's now owned by University of Texas. But that's where the State Teachers Association met. And we think the credit union might have been a part of that. I have found some documentation where the idea of a credit union and, I think a national credit union, entity was presented to the teachers association.

We haven't gotten much farther than that, but we are researching that.

One of the things that we have said as a neighborhood is that we've embraced the changes in terms of the demographics.

We have a lot of young white couples who are moving in. But what has been good since we've become a historic district is that they too are starting to embrace the history. And it's interesting to them to know that, "well, I'm in Ruth's house. I'm in John's house, and John did this, and John did that."

As a neighborhood association, we decided that we should have some social activities and that goes back even to the early days. They always had their social activities and, and, I can remember mother preparing her dishes to take for the neighborhood, party or get together or whatever. And so we felt like that's an important thing to do.

And so last year, we had what we called our Spring Fling, and we had a really good turnout.

We invited even neighboring communities to come, and some of our new residents came. We got to meet each other and, and they've expressed an interest in continuing to be active. So we're hoping, again, that the block party will probably take the place of our Spring Fling, and we're hoping to get some more of the neighborhood out so that we can know each other and meet each other.

Holidays were largely individual families. We'd wave and see each other, you know, in passing. And we got to know and many times already knew different family members of, for instance, the Kirks, we knew, the kids there, Ron and Connie and Sandra.

And the house next door was the McAllister's. Both of them were my classmates. So we knew each other, and through the years, because we went through school all through school together.

I knew the Marshall's and I knew the Marshall's, largely because my parents were friends of the Marshall's. I didn't know the Marshall's kids because I wasn't here when they were growing up.

So, And now I forgot the question that you asked. I forgot to play around, that he forgot where I was supposed to go. Holiday stories? holiday. So, you know, but, you know, if you don't happen to have holiday chores, did you and your family happen to have any traditions, like, did you, whenever you were coming back from college or once you moved?

My dad was an educator through and through, and his focus was on doing the best for his kids and everybody who came through Kealing – they were all his kids. And so that was his focus.

Our family trips, and this was something that we used to do a family trip, and it was always associated with either conference or continuing education for either my mom and my dad.

So he was always taking a class somewhere. So that was our travel. That was our vacation. really, I can remember being at the University of Connecticut. They were taking some courses there. How I got to Michigan State was that both my parents are graduates of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

You've probably heard this story before, but back in those days, in the '30s, the '40s before integration, the educators had nowhere to get their advanced degrees. So they were paid to go out of state to other schools. And so our teachers probably had the best education ever because they were all graduates of Columbia, Stanford, University of Michigan, just all of the best schools in the country. And so my dad, in the '30s, went to the University of Michigan.

That was before he married my mom and or right somewhere around in there. I can't remember the dates they actually married, but I think they married in probably '40, '41. Something like that. But I think he graduated in 1938, 39 from the University of Michigan.

And then, my mother started and I think hers was in the '50s. But in any case, they would go in the summers. And when I was born, they take me with them. So I was enrolled in school while they were enrolled in school. So I was in kindergarten, and at the University of Michigan.

And I remember those trips. It's just a great time, meeting fun people, meeting new people. And of course, even though it was midwest, northeast, whatever, hotels were still not easily accessible. While you could go, there just wasn't money to stay in a hotel for six weeks or that sort of thing.

So usually there was a family everywhere we went that we stayed with. So we got accustomed to. I don't recall my dad actually having a green book, but I know he had his lists of people. And so when we traveled, he would map out and he knew exactly typically how many miles he could make before dark.

And there would be a family at that location that we would spend the night. And so that's how we traveled. And we traveled all over the country that way, but I think the point of that story was that that's how I got to Michigan for school. Very interesting way of choosing a school. I just liked the state. It was pretty.

The flowers were beautiful. It was green and I just remembered it being pleasant experiences, so I've just made up my mind that I'd go somewhere in Michigan. Didn't have to be the University of Michigan. So I ended up at Michigan State. They accepted me first. And I decided, "well, why bother with the rest? I'll go there."

And, that's where I went. So my dad and I became rivals then for the Michigan-Michigan games. It was always, "okay, dad, we're going to beat you this year," that sort of thing.

I just recently came across a letter, and I'm not so sure it was a letter. This goes back, it was last year sometime. I found this, I think it was kind of like an autobiography that my dad wrote, and I didn't know this.

And I'm thinking, as I'm reading it, "why did we never talk about this?" But we didn't. He left home, and I'm thinking about you when you said, 14. He was somewhere between 13 and 15. His parents had a farm in East Texas, just outside of Corsicana. And that's where he grew up.

And I can't think of the moment how many siblings, but there were probably somewhere between seven and eleven of them. And, I remember them joking as they would get together from time to time. He and his brothers that, their parents had children, and this was common during that day – they had children to work the farm.

It wasn't because they wanted to have children or loved all these kids, but they needed them to maintain their existence. So, I do remember them laughing and joking about how that was the

case with their life. Well, I'm not certain why my dad, but something within him, he knew that he wanted an education, and so he left home because he knew that if he stayed there, he would not get an education.

I don't know why or how he came to that realization, but he left home, went into the city, enrolled in high school and finished high school, and then took himself to college. I don't know how he did it. But I just assumed that there was somebody along the way who saw his potential and who helped him. So I know that from a very early age, education was extremely important to him.

And so, on my mom's side, and some of this, kind of forgotten, so I do have to dig back into my boxes to know which person was which and who did what. But I did find the teaching certificate of either my grandmother's mother.

Again, the family history goes way back for education. My grandmother's father, I believe it was her father. I found a draft of his obituary that I found a handwritten letter. And he graduated from college, so that would have been in the 1800s. He finished from Rusk college in Mississippi.

And so even in my mom's family, it's interesting, the contrast of the two families, my dad's family, farmers and not educated. As I thought back to being around his mother, my grandmother, I'm not sure she really could read, because I started having memories of her once my dad moved her to Austin, which she did.

She was probably in her 80s, and she would have mother read things to her, and I never really thought about it. I thought it was her eyesight. But as I thought more about it, I thought, you know, I bet she really couldn't read. So their being the farmers and then mother's family was the city family.

But the interesting thing is the farm family, my dad's family thrived because they had food. They had a commodity, they could sell or they could provide for themselves. My mom's family didn't because they were city dwellers. They didn't have food, abundance of food and that sort of thing.

So it was very, very difficult for them, not that it wasn't also difficult for my dad, but just the contrast of the two types of families. But, the net of it is that the desire for education goes way back for a couple of generations. And I think they saw it as a means of improving their lives.

And that's what you heard all the time, you've got to get this education because that's the only way you're going to be able to compete and have a better life.

I'd like it to be remembered as a community of love. We didn't talk about our churches and what an important part of our lives our churches play. And the black church, I think, has been the strength of many of our communities, most of our communities.



As you look at the Bible, and as a believer, it's love that makes the difference in the world. And I see this community and saw this community as a community of love. While we had our differences, we were all the same, many of us had slight differences in our backgrounds, there was just a commonality. And we loved one another. And through that love you do things for one another. You care about one another. You're interested in how this person is doing. Is there something that I can help you with? Or your child knows my child? Can we do something together? I think those are all the things that I would like this community to be remembered for.