

The following interview was conducted with Florine Joseph for the Star City Treasurers AmeriCorps History Project. It took place on August the tenth, at 'F' Street Community Center. The interviewer is Rolonda Jones.

ROLONDA JONES: Okay I'll start off with a lil' something about your childhood. Okay, something like where you – where'd you grow up?

FLORINE JOSEPH: I grew up in Kansas City, Missouri.

ROLONDA JONES: Okay.

FLORINE JOSEPH: I was born in a community called Nashua, Missouri, right outside of Kansas City. But, I was only there for a couple of months. So I know nothing about that.

ROLONDA JONES: Oh.

FLORINE JOSEPH: And then, we moved from Kansas City, Missouri – I mean from, I'm sorry, from Nashua – when I was about two months old, moved to Independence, Missouri. And I stayed there until I was in second grade. And from second grade, I was in Kansas City, Missouri until I left in 1957.

ROLONDA JONES: Oh, okay. Then, from there where did you go?

FLORINE JOSEPH: I left Kansas City, moved to Houston, Texas.

ROLONDA JONES: Okay, okay. So you came from Houston to Lincoln.

FLORINE JOSEPH: From Houston to Lincoln.

ROLONDA JONES: Okay. Any siblings?

FLORINE JOSEPH: I had two brothers. I'm sorry, one brother and one sister. And, both of them are deceased.

ROLONDA JONES: Oh, okay. Well, that was nice to have them.

FLORINE JOSEPH: My mother and father are now deceased.

ROLONDA JONES: Okay. So when – were they here in Lincoln at all?

FLORINE JOSEPH: No, no. Missouri.

ROLONDA JONES: Okay. Missouri, they were in Missouri.

FLORINE JOSEPH: Mmhmm.

ROLONDA JONES: Okay. Okay, well (unintelligible). Okay um, okay – tell me a little bit about your education.

FLORINE JOSEPH: My education is high school, and extended – and I might say some college um, classes. Um, you know, I'm not sure how to answer that.

ROLONDA JONES: Okay, so where did most – okay, so like, your uh...

FLORINE JOSEPH: I went to high school, Kansas City, Missouri. Uh, Lincoln High School...

ROLONDA JONES: Oh, okay.

FLORINE JOSEPH: I went to (?Crispus Addox?) elementary. I went to Archie Cole Vocational. Um...

ROLONDA JONES: Hmm.

FLORINE JOSEPH: I left there, and I was not back into education until I was in Lincoln, Nebraska, and I working with the Community Action Agency. And, working with the Action Agency, I became very involved with uh, further education, in order to carry out my duties.

ROLONDA JONES: Oh. I must say you did a very great job, a *very* great job. [Laughs] So, did you, after – once you left Kansas City – did you ever see any of your old classmates?

FLORINE JOSEPH: I saw some of them, not too many.

ROLONDA JONES: Oh.

FLORINE JOSEPH: Not too many. A few.

ROLONDA JONES: Okay, so you, do you ever – is there anyone you still stay in contact with?

FLORINE JOSEPH: Uh, yes. I had a very close friend. In fact, she – we were not relatives, but we had some of the same relatives, so that made us feel closer than friends, you know? And um, we were very close, and we visited one another on a regular basis. In fact, for years I had a key to her house, so that any time I was coming to Kansas City and I could not make contact with her --

ROLONDA JONES: Mmhmm.

FLORINE JOSEPH: Or, just happened to be in Kansas City, I could go there and be there without looking for a hotel, motel.

ROLONDA JONES: Oh.

FLORINE JOSEPH: And, I had my room. In fact, it was so funny. When she bought, or redid,

her spare bedroom?

ROLONDA JONES: Uh-huh.

FLORINE JOSEPH: And [laughs], I mean, that's really funny. She bought this gorgeous bedroom furniture, and I was the only person that had spent time in that room, until she got very, very sick.

ROLONDA JONES: Oh! That was so *sweet*!

FLORINE JOSEPH: Mmhmm. And she had it well-decorated. I was very much at home in that room.

ROLONDA JONES: [Laughs] Yea, I don't think a hotel could compete with that, okay? 'Cause that's saying a lot about friendship.

FLORINE JOSEPH: And what made it so good about that, too – you know, so often when you travel, you have to kind of live out of your suitcase, when you stay with friends or family.

ROLONDA JONES: Right.

FLORINE JOSEPH: They just happen not to have that space for you to hang your clothes, or that drawer. But I had drawer space. So, as soon as I got there, if I knew I was staying I could empty out my suitcase, put it in drawers, hang up my clothes and be at home.

ROLONDA JONES: That's great. That --I mean, that's rare. That's what you call a *good* friendship.

FLORINE JOSEPH: And I do now, still have some friends that I visit. Phone calls.

ROLONDA JONES: Okay. And I think that's very important, too.

FLORINE JOSEPH: Yea.

ROLONDA JONES: Okay, so we're going to get on. Let's see. Uh, what about your marriage? When did you – and *where* did you – meet your husband?

FLORINE JOSEPH: Oh, I met him – Howard – in Independence, Missouri, when I was about fourteen. I went to spend the weekend in Kansas – in Independence.

ROLONDA JONES: Mmhmm.

FLORINE JOSEPH: And I met him through a young man that I knew. And, I liked what I saw, he liked what he saw. And, we did not see one another 'til probably another year or two.

ROLONDA JONES: Wow!

FLORINE JOSEPH: And then, I was at a dance at the Municipal Auditorium --

ROLONDA JONES: Uh-huh.

FLORINE JOSEPH: – when I saw him the second time. And, from that time on, we were together. Mmhmm. You know, and then it kinda got to where it was in and out, off and on. But, we still had some kind of...

ROLONDA JONES: That's great, that is great!

FLORINE JOSEPH: Mmhmm.

ROLONDA JONES: Okay so then, you guys – what, got married and came to Lincoln?

FLORINE JOSEPH: We were in, we were in Kansas City.

ROLONDA JONES: Mmhmm.

FLORINE JOSEPH: Let's see, we were in Kansas City. He left Kansas City. Yea, okay. Well, part of this I probably shouldn't say.

ROLONDA JONES: That's okay.

FLORINE JOSEPH: But we were in Kansas City together.

[Interviewer laughs]

FLORINE JOSEPH: And then we left. We moved to Houston. He left Houston after a number of years. He was unemployed at the time, bringing his mother to Lincoln –

ROLONDA JONES: Oh.

FLORINE JOSEPH: – to stay with his sister. While he was here, he found employment. And he wanted me to come here. I refused to come for probably two years, and then I came.

ROLONDA JONES: Oh. That was meant to be.

FLORINE JOSEPH: After coming here, we were together for a number of years, and then we split up.

ROLONDA JONES: Oh!

FLORINE JOSEPH: And so, I was not really single, but yet I was? Because, it was kind of like a back and forth thing for a while?

ROLONDA JONES: Ah, yea.

FLORINE JOSEPH: And it – maybe you're not gonna really say it was a split-up, but –

ROLONDA JONES: Separation?

FLORINE JOSEPH: – he was living in Omaha, he was doing construction work.

ROLONDA JONES: Oh.

FLORINE JOSEPH: He was in and out.

ROLONDA JONES: Okay.

FLORINE JOSEPH: In and out. And then finally, he *was* in Omaha and I was in Lincoln. And then, I continued to be here and work and, and you know, took care of my children. And then, later years, I met Paul Joseph.

ROLONDA JONES: Hmm.

FLORINE JOSEPH: And, I married Paul Joseph.

ROLONDA JONES: That was good. That was really nice. It was uh, one of those things.

FLORINE JOSEPH: Mmhmm.

ROLONDA JONES: Your path took you. And Paul – now, was Paul born here in Lincoln?

FLORINE JOSEPH: No. Paul was born in Jones, Oklahoma.

ROLONDA JONES: Oh, really?

FLORINE JOSEPH: Mmhmm.

ROLONDA JONES: That's where the nice people are.

FLORINE JOSEPH: Howard was born in Memphis, Tennessee.

ROLONDA JONES: Oh, well he wasn't far away from home.

FLORINE JOSEPH: Mmhmm.

ROLONDA JONES: Okay.

FLORINE JOSEPH: Yea, Howard was born in Memphis. He left Memphis, I think, when he was like seven or nine. And his family moved to Kansas City.

ROLONDA JONES: Oh. Okay.

FLORINE JOSEPH: Mmhmm. But, Paul was here. Paul was married. His wife died.

ROLONDA JONES: Mmhmm.

FLORINE JOSEPH: I met Paul through a friend of his.

ROLONDA JONES: Oh, okay.

FLORINE JOSEPH: He, um – I was at Malone Center, and this young man – I had not seen him for a long time.

ROLONDA JONES: Mmhmm.

FLORINE JOSEPH: And it was just so different. He and I had never really held a long conversation. But for some reason, that day, we were talking. And he told me, he says, 'Are you --', or he asked me, 'Are you still a single woman?' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'You know, you been single for a *long* time', he said. 'And you shouldn't be!' He said, 'You need to meet someone!' I said, 'Well, I do meet people but there not about anything, so I'm still by myself!'

[Interviewer laughs]

FLORINE JOSEPH: So, he says, 'You know, I'd like for you to meet a friend of mine. He, he needs company, he would like to have company...'

ROLONDA JONES: Mmhmm.

FLORINE JOSEPH: Uh, he says, 'There's one problem.' I said, 'Well, what is it?' He said, 'He's antique.'

[Interviewer laughs]

FLORINE JOSEPH: I said, 'He's *antique*?' [Laughs]

ROLONDA JONES: He said he's antique!

FLORINE JOSEPH: So, I said, 'Well, I don't care if he's antique or not!'

[Interviewer laughs]

FLORINE JOSEPH: You know, there's nothing wrong with me holding phone conversations with the man, if he needs company. There's nothing wrong with me visitin' with him.

ROLONDA JONES: Right.

FLORINE JOSEPH: So he says, 'Well, do you want his number, or do you want me to give him

your number?' I said, 'Give him *my* phone number.' He gave me that – he gave Paul my phone number –

ROLONDA JONES: Mmhmm.

FLORINE JOSEPH: – and Paul called me the next day. And after that, Paul uh, take me to Kansas City. He first took me to uh, Wichita, Kansas.

ROLONDA JONES: Mmhmm.

FLORINE JOSEPH: To meet his sister.

ROLONDA JONES: Oh!

FLORINE JOSEPH: And then, we'd go to Kansas City. Any time I felt like goin', he would go. He was just very nice. And then, pretty soon, he started saying, you know, maybe we could share stuff, you know? He would like my company.

ROLONDA JONES: Oh.

FLORINE JOSEPH: He would like to have me around, on a regular basis, you know?

ROLONDA JONES: Oh, okay.

FLORINE JOSEPH: And, how did I feel, what did I think about that? And, I gave it some thought, and I just felt like, 'Well, I'm not getting any younger.'

ROLONDA JONES: [Laughs] And now, he -- he was rare?

FLORINE JOSEPH: He was *very* rare.

ROLONDA JONES: Yea. He was rare.

FLORINE JOSEPH: If I was to tell you some of the other things, you would say he was *definitely* rare.

ROLONDA JONES: Oh, we'll have to do that with this off (refers to tape recorder). We can't tell that on the tape! [Laughs]

FLORINE JOSEPH: I know!

ROLONDA JONES: 'Cause I had – um, my son had told me *so* much about you, and I just knew I had to meet this lady. Um, the way he just talked about you, you know? It was like, one in a million. I'm like, 'Wow, she sounds like my mother!' You know? So, I thought that was unique, 'cause he didn't take to nobody.

FLORINE JOSEPH: Mmhmm.

ROLONDA JONES: He really didn't.

FLORINE JOSEPH: He was very, very uh, hesitant with me.

ROLONDA JONES: Mmhmm.

FLORINE JOSEPH: He was. He was very hesitant. And I just left that to, you know, he's young and uh, I'm new to him.

ROLONDA JONES: Yea.

FLORINE JOSEPH: And uh, he told me, you know, that his mother was not here. And I, you know, left that with him being young –

ROLONDA JONES: Yea.

FLORINE JOSEPH: – and without his mother. And uh, then I got to know him better, and found out a little bit as to why he may have been somewhat that way. And, I liked him, and I was all about helping people. And I felt like, this is a young person! If you're not gonna help a *young* person, who are you gonna help?

ROLONDA JONES: Yea. That's what he said! He said you, you were really good at helping people.

FLORINE JOSEPH: Mmhmm.

ROLONDA JONES: And, I'm like, 'Wow!' That really surprised me, because of the fact, one: I didn't know anything about Lincoln. And, I didn't know where it was at. And when he told me that, I was really surprised. I was surprised (unintelligible) black people out here, to start out with. But, let's get on with your interview! [Laughs] Okay, so uh, when you came to Lincoln -- okay, I would say, okay – since you've been here, what do you think about Lincoln, as far as the changes in, you know, the city itself, and the culture and uh -- the things that they do, period, here.

FLORINE JOSEPH: What do I think about it? Well, when I first came to Lincoln, I thought, 'Are there any black people in Lincoln, Nebraska?' I had – you know, I knew there were some black people, so I shouldn't word it that way.

ROLONDA JONES: Mmhmm.

FLORINE JOSEPH: But, there were so *few* –

ROLONDA JONES: Mmhmm.



FLORINE JOSEPH: -- that I felt like I was really, [laughs] as they might say, 'a fly in a buttermilk jar'.

ROLONDA JONES: [Laughs] Okay, that's understandable!

FLORINE JOSEPH: But um, the changes I see – I guess I would start with my personal things.

ROLONDA JONES: Mmhmm.

FLORINE JOSEPH: Like going to the beauty shop. At that time, most beauticians were doing hair out of their home. Uh, not only doing it out of their home, but maybe just doing it in the *kitchen*. Uh, there was, one or two, I believe, that had a shop *in* their home.

ROLONDA JONES: Mmhmm.

FLORINE JOSEPH: But, a lot of it was done from the kitchen. Um, which is no longer that way, you know? It opened up slowly, but it happened.

ROLONDA JONES: Good. That's good.

FLORINE JOSEPH: The stores, the department stores, you did not ever, *ever, ever* see black folks in the department stores.

ROLONDA JONES: Oh!

FLORINE JOSEPH: *I* didn't. Uh, maybe there were *some*, and I was not –

ROLONDA JONES: Far and few between.

FLORINE JOSEPH: -- you know, maybe I didn't go to those stores, but there were not. Uh, businesses, there were no black businesses. There was just none, that I can remember. There were not um, very many black people in leadership positions.

ROLONDA JONES: Mmm, okay.

FLORINE JOSEPH: Um, yea. [Sighs] Not very many.

ROLONDA JONES: So when you first came here, what exactly were you expecting? You know, when you first came to –

FLORINE JOSEPH: Well, when I came here from Houston, you know, it was all about busy, busy, busy.

ROLONDA JONES: Oh, okay.

FLORINE JOSEPH: Uh, it was about size. I was really used to large, metropolitan areas.

ROLONDA JONES: Cities.

FLORINE JOSEPH: Truthfully, I guess I would say it felt like a country town, you know? It was a small town, but you wouldn't really say it was a town? It was really a *city*. Lincoln was a *city*, but it felt small-townish.

ROLONDA JONES: Okay, okay.

FLORINE JOSEPH: You know, because of it's size. Because of the uh, the culture.

ROLONDA JONES: Okay.

FLORINE JOSEPH: You know, it's just all about white folks.

ROLONDA JONES: Yea.

FLORINE JOSEPH: You know? I was into clubs, and we had one club here, uh, at the time when I came. It was the Elks. They called it the black Elks, because that was separate from the white folkses Elks.

ROLONDA JONES: Okay.

FLORINE JOSEPH: And uh, so *all* people that liked the party life went to the Elks, the black Elks.

ROLONDA JONES: Oh, okay.

FLORINE JOSEPH: You know. And that was a good thing!

ROLONDA JONES: Yea, that was! [Laughs]

FLORINE JOSEPH: That was a good thing! Yea, I had a lot of fun at the black Elks.

ROLONDA JONES: Okay.

FLORINE JOSEPH: Um, I wish there was a black Elks now!

ROLONDA JONES: Hey, I know what you mean, I know what you mean.

FLORINE JOSEPH: Mmhmm. Um...

ROLONDA JONES: So, are those people who had that particular club, are any of that family still here in Lincoln? Is any of that family still living, or here in Lincoln?

FLORINE JOSEPH: Um, the club was actually operated by members.

ROLONDA JONES: Oh, okay, okay.

FLORINE JOSEPH: Mmhmm. It was operated by members.

ROLONDA JONES: Oh, that's good!

FLORINE JOSEPH: It was very good. It was kept up, it was maintained. Members um, operation members -- it was *all* about membership.

ROLONDA JONES: Mmhmm.

FLORINE JOSEPH: Um, it was open, um, to the general public.

ROLONDA JONES: Mmhmm.

FLORINE JOSEPH: Um, it is no longer around, which is bad. But there is membership in Omaha, if you wanted to continue that membership.

ROLONDA JONES: Oh, okay.

FLORINE JOSEPH: Mmhmm. Um...

ROLONDA JONES: Oh! Okay, so, now that you've been in Lincoln, and you have children who are grown now -- you have any grandchildren?

FLORINE JOSEPH: I do have two grown daughters. One lives in California, the bay area. It's called Castro Valley. And, Castro Valley sits between Oakland and San Francisco.

ROLONDA JONES: Mmhmm.

FLORINE JOSEPH: Um, I have one daughter that lives in Lincoln. She has two children -- a daughter, 18, and a son, 8.

ROLONDA JONES: (Unintelligible) Boy, time flies!

FLORINE JOSEPH: Mmhmm.

ROLONDA JONES: Whoo! Okay! [Laughs] Well, that was a shock to my system!

FLORINE JOSEPH: You know, I wanted to back track a little bit on the community, uh, in regards to churches.

ROLONDA JONES: Oh, okay.

FLORINE JOSEPH: That was the one place where, if you wanted to see a group of black people other than the Elks?

ROLONDA JONES: Mmhmm?

FLORINE JOSEPH: Go to the churches.

ROLONDA JONES: Oh.

FLORINE JOSEPH: The black community churches. That's where you would see a large number of churches.

ROLONDA JONES: Oh, okay!

FLORINE JOSEPH: No, a large number of black people. And it made you feel comfortable, it made you feel good.

ROLONDA JONES: Oh, I'm sure it did!

FLORINE JOSEPH: Mmhmm.

ROLONDA JONES: You know, 'cause even when I came out here, it was like...

FLORINE JOSEPH: And today, there's still that black congregation, in the black churches. But, there are also a *lot* more other races that attend these churches.

ROLONDA JONES: Black churches?

FLORINE JOSEPH: Which is different now, than it was then.

ROLONDA JONES: Yea. Okay, well I'm not gonna keep you too much longer, but I would like to ask you one question.

FLORINE JOSEPH: Sure.

ROLONDA JONES: For a black person just coming to Lincoln, what advice would you give that person?

FLORINE JOSEPH: Black person coming to Lincoln, what advice would I give that person?

ROLONDA JONES: Like, black from, like from San Francisco. Like from the bay area, for instance.

FLORINE JOSEPH: My advice would be to come in, not with an attitude. Come in, if you do not have your education, mix and mingle with *all* people. Don't come in that, you have to be with black folks.

ROLONDA JONES: Mmhmm.

FLORINE JOSEPH: Come in, get your education, and do whatever it is you need to do to help

you as an individual.

ROLONDA JONES: Okay.

FLORINE JOSEPH: That would be my advice, not to come in with an attitude, because there are still more white folks. But to come in, get your education, because things *are* available if you want them.

ROLONDA JONES: That's true. Okay, thank you Miss Flo. I appreciate this *so* much.