**Oral History Interview**

**with**

**Gloria Thomas Bailey**

Interview Conducted by

Tanya Finchum

March 9, 2017

Spotlighting Oklahoma

Oral History Project

**Oklahoma Oral History Research Program**

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**Interview History**

Interviewer: Tanya Finchum

Transcriber: Lauren Gray

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The recording and transcript of this interview were processed at the Oklahoma State University Library in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

**Project Detail**

The purpose of the *Spotlighting Oklahoma Oral History Project* is to document the development of the state by recording its cultural and intellectual history.

This project was approved by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board on April 15, 2009.

**Legal Status**

Scholarly use of the recordings and transcripts of the interview with Gloria Thomas Bailey is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on March 9, 2017.

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**About Gloria Thomas Bailey…**

Gloria Thomas Bailey was born in Langston, Oklahoma, in 1938, but she spent most of her life in Stillwater, Oklahoma. Bailey and her younger brother grew up with their grandparents in the predominantly African American neighborhood in southern Stillwater, and her grandfather, William Thomas, was one of the community’s leaders. He owned restaurants and properties in Stillwater, and Bailey remembers following him to his projects and learning handy skills.

Growing up in segregated Stillwater, Bailey recognizes that her grandparents may have sheltered her from some of the other parts of town. Bailey remembers that the black children were invited to come to the Leachman Theater only on certain days, and she could only enter restaurants through the back door in downtown Stillwater. She attended Washington School, and after leaving in the eleventh grade to have her oldest child in Arizona, Bailey received her high school equivalency diploma in 1981. Bailey discusses the close, African American community at the time, identifying some of the favorite businesses and prominent churches that were located in her part of Stillwater.

Bailey raised five children with her husband, who passed away many years ago. She worked at the Head Start program when it was first beginning in Stillwater, and she is very active in her church community with Mt. Zion. Bailey describes how her community has changed throughout the years and how she is grateful to continue to call Stillwater home.

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| **Gloria Thomas Bailey**  Oral History Interview  Interviewed by Tanya Finchum  & Stacy Delano  March 9, 2017  Stillwater, Oklahoma | T:\OralHistory\OralHistory_01\Projects\SOK\SOK_290_Bailey (SPL)\Photos\DSC_1385 cropped.jpg |

**Finchum** *Today is March 9, 2017. My name is Tanya Finchum. I’m with Oklahoma State University. Today, I am in Stillwater Public Library to interview Gloria Thomas Bailey, and this is going to be part of our* Stillwater African American Heritage Project*. Thank you for coming today.*

**Bailey** You’re welcome.

**Finchum** *Let’s begin with learning when and where you were born.*

**Bailey** I was born in Langston, Oklahoma, and my mother was going to college over there, to the university. My grandparents used to live there in Langston before—when my mother was a little girl, and then they moved to Stillwater.

**Finchum** *How did they come to be in Langston, your grandparents? What brought them there?*

**Bailey** My grandparents came from Texas, here. My grandfather came from South Carolina, here through Texas. He brought his fiancée, my grandmother, with him, and they got married in Oklahoma. My uncle married my grandmother and my grandfather. They lived in Meridian at that time, Meridian, Oklahoma, that’s there below Langston. They used to pick cotton, and my mother, and my uncle, and auntie used to go out with my grandmother to pick cotton. I don’t know what my grandfather did because he was working at the lumber company in Stillwater, so they moved from Langston to Stillwater after he got the job.

**Finchum** *That would have been about what time period, do you think?*

**Bailey** I really don’t know the time period.

**Finchum** *What year were you born?*

**Bailey** I was born in 1938.

**Finchum** *They were still in Langston at that point?*

**Bailey** No, they were in Stillwater.

**Finchum** *They were in Stillwater, okay. They were here.*

**Bailey** My grandparents was in Stillwater. My mother was going to school at the university, at Langston. When she finished college over there, she left my brother and I with our grandparents, because she went to Washington, DC. She was married at the time, and they went to Washington, DC. She took her secretary, whatever they call that course, and she got a government job. She worked for the Navy department of the states.

**Finchum** *How long were they there?*

**Bailey** I really don’t know how long they were there, but…I don’t know how long they were there.

**Finchum** *Was that during the war?*

**Bailey** It was during the Depression. My grandmother got sick, so my mother came back home. She said when they traveled back home, there was so much snow. (Laughs) They didn’t think they were ever going to get through that to come back home. She never did go back. She stayed here with her and took care of her mother. She was already married when she went up there, but they got a place in Stillwater, and they stayed here. My grandmother was sick, so she didn’t travel back up there because she wanted to be close to her mother.

**Finchum** *What were your grandparents’ names?*

**Bailey** My grandmother’s name was Emily, and my grandfather’s name was William Thomas, and they called him Bill or Will Thomas.

**Finchum** *Okay, and what did he do in Stillwater?*

**Bailey** He worked for a lumber company, but he was working on the rock crusher. He was crushing rock when he first…. He was on the rock crusher. He lost his eye working on the rock crusher. He worked Hoke. I don’t know what he did for him, but he was always up there doing something. He was a carpenter, he a was masonry, he was a plumber. He also moved houses in on those big old horses, whatever they call them things. (Laughs)

**Finchum** *Mules?*

**Bailey** Yes, those mules. He moved houses, and he had quite a little land in Stillwater. Whomever wanted a part of that land, he would sell them what part they wanted, so they could move in. He came here a little bit after the land run.

**Finchum** *Your family has been in the area a long time.*

**Bailey** Yes, and the address is on the census, and he also kept boarders.

**Finchum** *Was he a landlord?*

**Bailey** Yes, but when he started off, he didn’t have that many places. When he ended up, he had an apartment building with five apartments, a house, a duplex—one, two, three, four, five, six houses. And he rented out rooms in his home. They bought this house from a guy that used to live in that house, and it was three rooms, so he built other rooms on, attached to that.

**Finchum** *How many children did he have?*

**Bailey** He had…. My grandmother lost three children, and then they had three more children. My mother was the oldest. My uncle, the boy, was in between the two girls, so they had three more children.

**Finchum** *Where was this house?*

**Bailey** It’s on the corner of Eleventh and Hester. At that time, it had hedges all the way around the front fence. My brother and I could not see over that hedge, and we couldn’t see under the hedge. (Laughs) Right across the street from us, on the corner, was a store. It wasn’t Haskins’ store. It was a grocery store across the street from us with an apartment building at the top. Freedman’s Store, he had an apartment and store there. The Haskins moved into Stillwater, and they had a store on Twelfth and Hester. That’s right across the street from the school where I went.

**Finchum** *From your grandparents’ house to Washington School was, what, two or three blocks?*

**Bailey** One block.

**Finchum** *One block. I do my geography, okay. (Laughs)*

**Bailey** One block, and you know that the park that’s down there now was a football park where [Oklahoma] A&M College, Stillwater High School, and Washington School played their sports.

**Finchum** *You could just about watch it from your house.*

**Bailey** No, you couldn’t. They had a board fence. (Laughter)

**Finchum** *Drill a hole in it.*

**Bailey** They did drill a hole, and they had trees, and they climbed up those trees, especially the ones that could do that. They would climb up in the trees and watch the game. The ones that bored the holes in it, if the police would catch them, they got in trouble. Yes, they did all the sports down there, until they got a place of their own, the University.

**Finchum** *If you were born in nineteen thirty…*

**Bailey** Eight.

**Finchum** *...eight, you moved to Stillwater when you were?*

**Bailey** A few months old.

**Finchum** *So first grade, you went to Washington School?*

**Bailey** I went to what they called nursery school, and the nursery school was in the frame building. There was the frame building for the nursery school, and they had the first, and second, and third grade in that building. They had the home ec class in that building and the library.

**Finchum** *The library, on Twelfth?*

**Bailey** On Twelfth and Hester, yes. Then they built the wings to the building like it stands now, it was not like that. It was just an old building with a few…. What is that, inserts, places added on to it, then they moved the library into one of those places.

**Finchum** *Did this library serve the community or just the schoolchildren?*

**Bailey** I don’t know about that. I was too young to know about that. (Laughter) It might have because—and then we had a black Chamber of Commerce.

**Finchum** *Did it have its own office?*

**Bailey** Yes.

**Finchum** *Where was it, roughly?*

**Bailey** What do you mean, the office for their…. I don’t know that. I know that when they got ready to have their meeting, they would have it at the school.

**Finchum** *Did the school have a cafeteria?*

**Bailey** Yes, a frame building. We had a frame building on the west side, and we had a frame building on the east side. The frame building on the west side was the pre-school, and then the frame building on the east side was the lunch building.

**Finchum** *Were the cooks good?*

**Bailey** Oh yes, and my teacher would always stand over me because I didn’t drink the milk. See, I didn’t know at the time that I didn’t drink cow milk. I’d drink goat milk, and the milk taste different. She would stand over me and make sure that I drink my milk, because if she didn’t, I was going to give it away. (Laughs) They were just waiting for her to leave, so that I could give whoever was sitting by me my milk, because they knew I wasn’t going to drink it. She made sure that I’d drink milk. I tasted it, but it didn’t taste good.

**Finchum** *How would they start the day? Did they do the Pledge of Allegiance or a prayer?*

**Bailey** They did a prayer, Pledge of Allegiance, and then they sang “Glory, glory, hallelujah,” the “Battle Hymn of the Republic.” Then they would point at me, (laughs) when they’d get to the chorus. I would be sitting up there, crying. The teacher would be sitting up there smiling. I would be watching her, and I would be wondering, “Why is this lady smiling? They’re over here, pointing at me, pointing their finger at me, saying ‘Glory, glory, hallelujah.’”

That’s what they called me at the time, because the teacher did not know my name was Gloria. When her daughter came from California, her daughter’s a teacher, too, and she said, “Mother, her name is not Glory. Her name is Gloria.” My mother and her daughter went to school together at Washington School. It was an elementary school first. They added the other classes to it, but it was an elementary school first.

**Finchum** *About how many were in your class?*

**Bailey** About fifteen.

**Finchum** *All the way through? Fifteen or twenty as you went through?*

**Bailey** I quit school at eleven. I went to school the first semester of the eleventh grade, and I quit. Yes, but I got my GED [General Education Diploma] in 1981. I also had college credit because I started working with the preschool down at the building on Eleventh Street, the Head Start program. When the Head Start program started, they had a meeting at the church, and everybody had children. I had children, but they were older. They asked me, “Lady, what are you here for?” I said, “I’m here for a job!” (Laughs) I worked in that program for fifteen years, yes, when they first started. Didn’t think I wanted to be a teacher, but then again, I’d babysit before I even got the job, so I did get into babysitting.

**Finchum** *You had the experience.*

**Bailey** Yes.

**Finchum** *If you dropped out, that would have been early ’50s. No, do my math, ʼ55, ’54, somewhere through there?*

**Bailey** Yes, ’54.

**Finchum** *That was right before they integrated the schools.*

**Bailey** Right, right. I went to Arizona, and then I came back. My grandfather sent me out there because I was expecting a child.

**Finchum** *He sent you there?*

**Bailey** He sent me out there thinking—well see, I didn’t know why he sent me out there. I cried all—I hadn’t ever been on a bus by myself, and going that distance, I just didn’t know. I cried all the way out there, I was so upset but I enjoyed my travel. After I got out there, I enjoyed it.

**Finchum** *Where did he send you to?*

**Bailey** To my uncle’s, yes. My uncle, him and his wife was nice. He had married a Mexican lady. She speak not very fluent English, but she did speak English where I could understand her. I asked her would she teach me how to speak Spanish. She said, “No,” (laughs) so I came back. My grandfather, even before I went out there, had a restaurant. He had two or three restaurants because he had a restaurant right next to the house where we were living, on Eleventh in the 700 block. Then he had established a restaurant in the 600 block on Eleventh Street.

**Finchum** *What kinds of foods would he serve?*

**Bailey** Soul foods, and ice cream, and sometime, he would have bread in there, sometimes, but he would serve food. After that, if any of the people wanted to have a birthday party or whatever, or a get-together in the evenings after they closed, they used to stay open for that.

**Finchum** *Did it have a name?*

**Bailey** The Rose Bowl.

**Finchum** *The Rose Bowl? Both of them? And then the second one?*

**Bailey** The other one, I don’t know because I was—I don’t know how old I was. I had to be about five, four or five. He would never let me go into the one that was next door to us. If I wanted a hamburger, he said, “Baby, you stand right there. I’ll get the hamburger. You just stand right there, and just wait until Pawpaw gets your hamburger.” (Laughs) He never let us go in there, my brother and I.

**Finchum** *Any reason why?*

**Bailey** I don’t know. Yes, I’m quite sure there was a reason why, but I didn’t know.

**Finchum** *He didn’t share that? (Laughs)*

**Bailey** Right, he didn’t share that because I was kind of sheltered. My brother and I was kind of sheltered because we had that fence surround us, made of hedges. We couldn’t crawl through because if we do, we’d get stuck, and we’d get all scratched up, and they would know we went in. (Laughs) We had three openings. We had one there, by where you go out to go to that restaurant, and then we had one that would go up to one of the houses that he had. We had a hydrant outside, up under the hedges, where the people that lived in that little house could go get water because there was no water in that house. They would go to get their water, and then the hedges that open to the street, so we couldn’t go to the edge of the hedges. We had to stay on the inside of the hedge.

**Finchum** *If you did get in trouble, how did they punish you? Who would do…. Did you get spanked, or time out, or what?*

**Bailey** You know what, I don’t remember my grandmother spanking me. My grandfather worked all day. He would come home about four thirty, five o’clock, or six almost. He came home after he got out of work, and we would be good then. (Laughs) The only time I would get out from behind the hedges was when I’d see him coming, I would run out there, run down the street to meet him. He would allow that, but I couldn’t do it very often. I had to be a little bit older before I could do that.

**Finchum** *Would they let you walk to school?*

**Bailey** We always walked to school.

**Finchum** *As a group or what?*

**Bailey** My brother and I, we had a doctor medicine bag, and my brother said he ain’t carrying it. That’s what we carried our books in. I said to myself, “This thing is heavy,” and I was a little thing. I mean I was very small. My brother was a little bit heavier than I was. I was always a little skinny thing, and he would always have me carry this big ole bag. When he would get down to the end of the street, before we go across the street to the school, he would get his books out, (laughs) so I had to carry the bag. He was very knowledgeable about not being embarrassed, so he didn’t carry it.

**Finchum** *At the restaurants, was his customers mostly African American, or would whites come?*

**Bailey** Sometime—the first restaurant, there was no racial thing because one of the plumbers here in Stillwater, I can’t remember his name, said that he used to go down and get—because he barbecued, he was a barbecuer. He said, “I remember I used to come down….” I didn’t know this. My grandfather died, and he came down to do—we had a leak up under the house. He came to repair that, and he said, “I do remember this house right here. This was a restaurant, and your grandpa did this, and did that.” I said, “What?” He said, “Yes, I knew your grandpa.” I said, “Okay,” and I think I asked him one question. He said, “Yes, we used to come down.” I said, “You all used to come down here?” My grandfather wasn’t a person that—we didn’t know prejudice. Any person we saw, they were people, and we played with whomever. My grandparents did not teach us prejudice, so all people were good people, until we see them fighting. (Laughs) Across the street, we would hear all this confusion over there. When the confusion started, my grandmother would gather us up and take us in the house, so we didn’t hear too much.

**Finchum** *What was the neighborhood?*

**Bailey** The neighborhood was from Jefferson, because there was some blacks over in that area. That started on Eleventh and Jefferson to Washington. There was some whites on the side of Eleventh, from Jefferson to Washington, but it was not those houses facing the south. They were all facing the north, so there were trees back there from…. Ninth Street would be from Washington to West Street, and from West Street to Fourteenth. We lived on Fourteenth. My mother and her husband lived on Fourteenth Street because my grandfather owned houses down there, too, that he rented.

**Finchum** *Within that area, you had businesses, you had the school …*

**Bailey** Yes, we had two grocery stores. We had a beer joint that was on Twelfth Street, and we had Miss Lena’s place, where the children gather, and Mama Lucy’s place, family place that you’d go across the—what we called ‘across the creek.’ Twelfth Street didn’t go through—not Twelfth Street. Washington didn’t go all the way through at that time. Where the park is now, that street didn’t go all the way through, either. We had to go across there by walking, because cars couldn’t drive across the other streets to get to Jefferson. If we were going anywhere on Jefferson, we had to go down Eleventh Street to Jefferson.

**Finchum** *Okay, so Mama Lucy’s?*

**Bailey** Mama Lucy’s, yes.

**Finchum** *What was there?*

**Bailey** We danced. They had candy, hamburgers. They had pickles. They had anything that the kids liked. (Laughs) Yes, and then the other place was the same, Miss Lena’s, had that, too. On Eleventh Street, there was a beer joint. There was a beer joint on the west side, and I don’t know whether they gambled in there or not. Anyway, kids could go there, up in the daytime, and dance. After four o’clock or five o’clock, we had to leave, and then the adults go in. Then the barbecue place was across the street, that was Leo’s Barbecue, and he stayed there a long time. Up the street from there, there was about two houses down going west, would be a barber shop there, and what else? Barber shop there, but there was another barber shop somewhere. My grandfather had a barber shop in his restaurant building. He had a barber shop and a beauty shop in there, and then we had…. On Jefferson, I think there was a lady up there that sold things for the kids up in that area, because we couldn’t wander off. We could not wander off like kids doing now. We were kind of close. My mama would say, “You stay here! You stay here! You don’t go off into…. wander off.” Even though you know the other people, you didn’t wander off.

**Finchum** *It was safe or not safe?*

**Bailey** As far as I know, it was safe. I didn’t hear of no children coming up missing. (Laughter) I really didn’t.

**Finchum** *Would you have….*

**Bailey** We had a malt shop on Washington, about two doors from Twelfth, coming up, going south.

**Finchum** *It sounds like you wouldn’t have to venture into Stillwater for much.*

**Bailey** Right, we didn’t have to…. On Sundays, there was one of the deacons of our church that would come and ask the parents, “Could we go on sightseeing trips,” so we would go out. He would take us out on McElroy, in that area over there, where the German refugees used to be.

[Five minute break 25:55-30:55]

**Finchum** *You were telling us about German prisoners or something.*

**Bailey** The German refugees, yes. You didn’t know that they were in Stillwater?

**Finchum** *No.*

**Bailey** Okay, they had those bunkers over there, that they tore down and built those apartment buildings over on McElroy, those were where the Germans used to be.

**Finchum** *I had not heard that.*

**Bailey** I don’t think they talk about it too much, but anyway, we were told that the—I don’t know what wars that they flee from, whatever—they came from over there, but yes, there were German refugees out there. Right there where the hospital is now, there was some bunkers there, and they were there, too.

**Finchum** *I didn’t know that, either.*

**Bailey** Okay, (laughs) yes. He would take us out and he would tell us the story about that. I was so crazy and wild at that time, I wasn’t listening. I was playing, (laughter) so I didn’t get all of it. I did hear about the German refugees because he always said, “I’m going to take them out there, and let them see,” because we couldn’t go out of the community. Somebody had to escort us out, or chaperone us, so we had a lot of chaperones.

**Finchum** *Always someone watching.*

**Bailey** Yes, we always had—there were always…. The children now they disrespect the adults, whether they drink alcohol or whatever, you couldn’t do that. You couldn’t disrespect. I don’t care how old, I don’t care what kind of conditions they were in, you could not disrespect them. You had to respect them, whatever condition they were in, and I appreciate that. There are kids today, children today don’t.

**Finchum** *When you say you had to be escorted, that was something that the adults decided on?*

**Bailey** No.

**Finchum** *That was the times?*

**Bailey** It was the times, yes.

**Finchum** *Did you have any interaction with white children?*

**Bailey** Sure, I used to follow my grandfather around everywhere. If he go on a job, or he going to be fixing or repairing something, if he was in a good mood, he would take me with him. My brother didn’t want to go because he knew he would have to work. (Laughter) I didn’t mind the work, but I didn’t have to work, so I would play with the children. In the black park on [Fifteenth] Street, there was a girl who used to come to the park all the time that we got to be friends, a little white girl. We used to play in the park together all the time, but her parents let her come down, and we played. We didn’t know the difference, we just children.

**Finchum** *Go to each other’s houses?*

**Bailey** No.

**Finchum** *Just in the park?*

**Bailey** Just in the park. We didn’t venture that far. My parents probably wouldn’t have let me do it anyway, unless you knew the parents, and if they did—they would have to know the parents before we would venture off to do that.

**Finchum** *Within the community, you had grocery stores, barber shops, restaurants, church?*

**Bailey** Yes, three churches. Mt. Zion, which was named [Second Baptist] before it was Mt. Zion, and then the Church of God in Christ, which has changed to Lawson Temple. We had a Methodist church on Tenth Street. It was the largest church that we had because the families in that area, some of them had real large families. If we had a funeral or something like that, that’s where they would take it to.

**Finchum** *About how many were in the community, have any idea?*

**Bailey** I don’t know, I have no idea.

**Finchum** *A couple hundred?*

**Bailey** No, not more than a hundred because it was a developing area, because most of these people lived in the country, and they moved. They used to ride the bus to school, and we had a bus that would come from the east, and go to the east side to pick up the kids. One would go [southwest] to pick up the kids and whatever, go back out to pick them up, bring them into school. I think there was a school out there. I don’t know what the name of it was, but they closed it down, in the country. They would start coming to Washington School in Stillwater.

**Finchum** *Where in the country, though?*

**Bailey** Between Langston and Stillwater, and between Cushing, or even the other one….

**Finchum** *I was reading, like Clayton? Does that sound familiar?*

**Bailey** Clayton is down farther, isn’t it?

**Finchum** *North of Perkins or something, I think, wasn’t it?*

**Bailey** I haven’t ever been there. The only place I have been….

**Finchum** *Okay, been to Progress?*

**Bailey** Progress, yes. They used to visit out there every summer for a great big dinner because they’d have a homecoming. They would have food, food, food, food, then they had a service. I didn’t go to Progress because I lived in Stillwater, and I was here. There was a lot of people that moved in I didn’t know about.

**Finchum** *When you say country, it wasn’t that far then?*

**Bailey** It’s not that far out. It’s about maybe ten miles, maybe not even that far. I don’t know how far Progress is. There’s some ladies that live here in Stillwater that used to go to Progress. I don’t know when they moved to Stillwater. I remember them moving into Stillwater, but I don’t know the date.

**Finchum** *Where are the cemeteries for these three churches in the community?*

**Bailey** In the community? There aren’t, because it’s not…. They have an area for the black out—and then there’s some of them be buried in Progress, some other place.

**Finchum** *There’s not any by the churches, no cemeteries beside the churches, like some churches you see?*

**Bailey** I think so. I don’t know now. I’m trying to think whether or not there’s a cemetery close to Progress Church.

**Finchum** *Where are your grandparents buried?*

**Bailey** My grandparents are buried out here, at Fairlawn. My great-grandmother’s buried out here at Fairlawn, but we couldn’t find the grave because they said something happened, a flood or something. I don’t know what happened. Anyway, we can’t find the grave. That was my grandmother’s mother, that’s here, so we can’t find her grave.

**Finchum** *What was her….*

**Bailey** Her name was Lucinda Muse, M-U-S-E.

**Finchum** *They had come through Texas here?*

**Bailey** We don’t actually know where they originated from. I’m still trying to search that. We think that she may have come from Louisiana, Mississippi, somewhere from the south, because we haven’t got that far. We did get my great-great-grandfather, and he was from Virginia, I think, but other than that, no.

**Finchum** *Your grandfather was quite an entrepreneur.*

**Bailey** My grandfather ran away from home. (Laughs) His mother died when he was very young, and his father married again. He said there was two people that he didn’t like, and that was his stepmother and his teacher. I don’t know what grade the teacher was. He came here, and I heard he could read when he got here, I guess. He worked his way through, from his hometown, here. He helped build—he cut that railroad track through that mountain in South Carolina, where he was coming from. We were going down there to a church convention in that area, and my grandfather told us as we were sight-seeing all the sights that we could see, because he worked in that area.

**Finchum** *He was quite…. He was a go-getter.*

**Bailey** Yes, he was, (laughs) and he never did go back home. What he did, he tried to burn all ties between him and his family. I thought that was kind of strange to me, because why would you want to do that to your family? We want to know something about your family, but I guess he wasn’t thinking that way. He was a person that protected, he protected [everyone].

**Finchum** *Was he active in the church?*

**Bailey** Yes, Mt. Zion—[Second Baptist was] the name of the first church. He was one of the deacons that organized and help make that first church.

**Finchum** *Sounds like he was one of the leaders in the community?*

**Bailey** Yes.

**Finchum** *Were there some others?*

**Bailey** There were a lot of others, but I don’t know their names because I was young, I didn’t know their names. The Baptist church was on Seventh Street, and the reason they moved from Seventh Street because they couldn’t pay the taxes, so they moved down to Eleventh Street. Then, when the flood came—I don’t know nothing about the flood. I don’t know about what they was talking about at one of the meetings that I went to. I don’t know, but I been here all my life, and I didn’t know nothing about that.

I lived in the area, and I didn’t know nothing about that. The things that they were saying, they didn’t hold true with me. Not that it didn’t happen, I don’t know. I might have been asleep, I might have been out of it. I don’t know, but I don’t drink, and I don’t smoke. (Laughs) What they were saying about that, I know a flood used to come up around Mt. Zion when it was down on Eleventh Street, but it never got in it, to my knowledge.

**Finchum** *It is kind of flat down there, isn’t it?*

**Bailey** It is, because we’re in a bowl, and we’re in the lowest part.

**Finchum** *Would the school flood, too?*

**Bailey** Let me tell you about that. The school didn’t flood until they opened the street [South Washington] up here, where Sprouts [Farmers Market] is. There used to be a school there they called Eugene Field. When Eugene Field went out of…. When they closed down the school at Eugene Field, they cut that land down because it used to be up a little bit higher than what it is now. When they did that, all the floodwaters came down from the north, all the way down to where we were, because they cut the land down. It has been flooded.

When they first started, when they first did it, it didn’t come up. It came up to the back of the school, that room on the back of the school. The next time, it came up a little bit higher, and then it ended up…. I don’t know whether they continued to cut the land down or what, because they was building buildings all over the University. If they had any hilly areas down in that area, then that water would come straight down south, because water does travel south. (Laughs) Then, the water started coming up, then it ended up at Twelfth Street.

**Finchum** *I’ve seen it flooded a time or two.*

**Bailey** Yes, and then next thing I know, it was right up there by the Church of God in Christ by Mt. Zion. I said, “What’s happening to this? Why have they….” It hadn’t dawned on me that they might have been cutting some more land down, because once you cut the land down, the water washes down. You can’t stop it because water is strong. It’s a strong force, and then it end up right there. I said, “Listen, if this water comes up here, on this hill at Eleventh and Hester, I have got to get out of here because I can’t swim!” (Laughs) I cannot swim because I was afraid of water, when it comes to that kind of water.

I never did wade in the waters when the flood waters came by. My brother used to get out there in the water, wade out there. My grandma would be telling him to, “Come back, come back, come back!” My mother be telling him, “Come back, come back, come back!” He wouldn’t. He loved to be out there in the water. I said “No, I am not coming out there in no water. No, not me. That’s too much water,” because I was real small. I figured my feet would be up in the air, so I didn’t try. I’m the only one that didn’t try it because I was too scared. He would say, “You’re a scaredy-cat!” I said, “That’s all right, too. At least I’m going to be safe,” so I didn’t try it.

**Finchum** *Could he swim?*

**Bailey** Yes.

**Finchum** *At least enough to….*

**Bailey** Yes, he learned how to swim early. (Laughs) We was living on [Fifteenth] Street. There’s a creek down there, on the other side of the park, on the south side of the park, and he wanted to learn how to swim. These larger boys said, “You want to learn how to swim?” They threw his butt out in the water. (Laughs) They said, “Swim or drown,” (laughs) and he learned how to swim, and he could swim. I couldn’t. I said, “You throw me up in there, you all are going to be very—you all are going to regret it because I’m going to fight.” (Laughter) They didn’t try that because see, I grew up with boys. I grew up with five boys. It was me and my brother, the other was my classmates, and they didn’t tangle with me. When you’re the only girl with a bunch of boys, you have to learn how to defend yourself.

We had one boy named Johnny Sims, and the principal could not stand that boy, at least I don’t think he could. This is my opinion. I think the boy was so smart, and if you don’t have nothing to entertain a child that’s that smart, they’re going to get in trouble. That’s what you think they doing, getting in trouble. They may not even be getting in trouble, they trying to find something to occupy their time. The principal would always, every day, he would be in the office. The principal couldn’t catch him if he ran after him, so he had the boys that played in the sports to go get him, and they couldn’t hardly outrun him. The only one that could outrun him was the long legs, and that was the tall one, and they would bring him back kicking. I think that might have been the reason that the principal could not get along with him because he was smart, so intelligent.

**Finchum** *Start a track team, and let him…. (Laughter)*

**Bailey** That’s one thing we didn’t have.

**Finchum** *Didn’t have a track team?*

**Bailey** We didn’t have a track team.

**Finchum** *What sports did you have?*

**Bailey** Basketball and football.

**Finchum** *Were you any good?*

**Bailey** Oh yes, we were in championships. We had one white student…. I didn’t look at color, and when he mentioned, “Yes, I went to school down there,” “When did you go to school down here,” and he told me. I said, “That was you?” (Laughs) He said, “Yes, my mother put me in school down there.” He said all he wanted to do was play on the football team because our school would win every game. We weren’t quite that—he exaggerated. Sometimes, we did win a lot of games. We had championship games, we went to Oklahoma City to the tournaments and things, and won games of basketball and football.

**Finchum** *What schools would you play, against Stillwater or other….*

**Bailey** Cushing. Cushing didn’t have a football team. They had a basketball team, so they could practice all year long because that’s all they did was basketball. They didn’t do football. We played Ponca City, they had a basketball and a football team. We played Enid, and we played Chandler, they had a football and a basketball team. We played Wellston.

**Finchum** *Primarily other black schools?*

**Bailey** Yes, I think they played, when they got to the, what we called, a tournament in Oklahoma City, I’m not sure, but I’m thinking that they might have played a white school. I’m not sure because I didn’t get to go to that, but I went to all the others. My grandfather always made a preparation for us to be able to go to the games. My brother played football and basketball. I wanted to play basketball, but they didn’t have a girls’ team. They had a girls’ team when my mother was going to school.

**Finchum** *It changed, times changed, or they didn’t have the money?*

**Bailey** I don’t know. I think it was…. Here I go, I think it was the difference between the principals. Maybe the other principal wanted girls to be able to play, and maybe the one that we did have did not want. I don’t know what the deal was.

**Finchum** *Maybe they didn’t have competition, someone else to play.*

**Bailey** No, we had competition. Yes, we had because Perry had a girls’ team, and you could find other teams in Oklahoma that had girls’ teams.

**Finchum** *Were there enough girls in Washington that would have played?*

**Bailey** Sure, but it wasn’t offered to them.

**Finchum** *What did the girls get to do?*

**Bailey** We had chorus. We sing. We’d sing in the state singing—what do you call it? For the schools. We had one of the…. I can’t think of the position he held out here at the OSU, a director of that particular... There was a whole bunch of us, and he said that was the best thing he ever done. He was our director for that chorus that we was in.

**Finchum** *Did they have a band, too, a marching band?*

**Bailey** We had a marching band, but we came late. I was in the marching band, but I didn’t learn how to play for a long time. (Laughter) They had me on the end. I’m glad they did. They had me in the back, on the end. (Laughter) It was an instrument that I didn’t care for, because I was so small. I don’t think I was smaller than any of the other girls. I might have been, but I saw myself as being big, larger than some of the girls. The teacher said that, “No, you can’t play….”

I wanted to play the snare drums, but they didn’t allow me to do that. I didn’t want to be no majorette. I didn’t want none of that short stuff, no way. (Laughter) I don’t like that short stuff, but the drums, and I played the bass drum when there’s wasn’t nobody there. When the player was sick, I would play that, but I couldn’t play the trumpet. I couldn’t play the trombone. I couldn’t play that other thing that you put your—that thing that goes over your head, I couldn’t play that because I couldn’t make a sound.

**Finchum** *Tubas, yes.*

**Bailey** I couldn’t make no sound go through the tuba, couldn’t make no sound go through the trombones. I couldn’t make the sound go through the trumpet. They gave me a clarinet, and I squeak awful. (Laughter) My fingers would not go over those holes. Every now and then I could get them over them. I don’t know how I did it, but I finally got it. I learned how to play one song. I said to myself, “When I get out of school,” I left school, “I was leaving my clarinet.” I said, “I don’t want this thing,” because that’s what the teacher did instead of you giving the child what they want. They will be more apt, want to be able to do it if you give them the instrument that they want.

I wasn’t buying no clarinet, and the thing squeak all the time, too. You would have to have a reed, and you got to do this, and you got to do that. No, I didn’t like that, but that’s what they gave me. My girlfriend, she played the trumpet. She was good because they can make the air go through that thing and make it seem like it was so easy. I would say, “Let me. Can I do that?” I couldn’t even get a pucker in that and make a sound. I said, “How do you all do this,” but they did it. Yes, they did it.

There was a lady that…. My principal said that we weren’t going to have a band. I don’t know how it came up, but I was in the meeting. My parents went to the meeting, and they said that they asked for a band for the children, and he said, “No, they will not have a band.” This lady was there, and she overheard him, and she was sitting behind my mama. She said, “Yes, they going to have a band,” and the next year, we had a band. Then, the teacher—so the principal had to get us a teacher.

**Finchum** *Who was the principal, what was his name?*

**Bailey** Lee A. Ward, Mr. Ward.

**Finchum** *Did he paddle?*

**Bailey** Oh yes, he liked to. (Laughs) Me and him didn’t have a very good understanding. I think we were two of a kind. Sometimes, when you get the two of a kind, they clash, but I didn’t mean no harm in it. (Laughs) I was a person that—my grandparents always taught me to not spend all your money in one place. I didn’t get that much money. The other kids got, probably, a whole lot more money than I did, so they would go across the street to the store, because the store was right across the street from the school. That’s when they had them great big ole fat, juicy, delicious apples. They would be so mellow, and they would get one of them great big ole juicy—but I couldn’t do that. When I did get enough money to do that, I went and got me one.

They got chewing gum, and pop, and bubblegum, and they made them big ole bubbles. Well, I’d buy the—they bought the expensive gum. I bought the penny gum. It had five sticks in it. Instead of me putting the whole stick in my mouth, I would take it and tear it, and put that little piece in there. They was wondering why I had so much more gum than they did. “Well, I don’t put all of my gum in my mouth. You all put all yours in and your mouth’s bulging out with chewing gum, and what you all don’t know is that it doesn’t take all that.”

I went to the chalkboard. My teacher had me go to the chalkboard to do a problem up there, a math problem. When I went back to my seat, somebody had been in my handbag. When I looked over, this girl was chewing. I said, “Yes, that was you that been in my purse,” and she was like, “I got some gum out of your purse.” I said, “You are not supposed to be going in my purse. You don’t see me going in yours, so why would you want to do me that way?” I never had a fight with girls. I always had fights with boys. Said to myself, “You don’t want me to do that to you. No, you just don’t want me to do that.” I went and talked to the teacher and told her what had happened. She said, “Go to the office, and you report it to the principal.” So I did, because my grandfather also told me, “Always get an adult involved, and when you can’t get an adult involved, then you take care of it yourself.” (Laughs) After I reported it to the principal, he called her to the office, but he didn’t do anything.

The next time, she did the same thing again. Maybe about a week later, did the same thing again, and I went to the teacher, and told her, “She went back through my purse again, took some things out.” She said, “Go to the office, and report it to the principal.” I went down there the second time. The third time she did it, and the teacher told me to go to the principal’s office, I told the principal, I said, “You know what? I’ve been down here twice, and this is my third time down here.” I said, “You don’t have to take care of it. I will take care of it.” He got angry. He got upset with me.

I said, “Because when I come down here, I don’t know what’s going on, and I don’t even care.” I said, “I just want them to stop going in my bag, but I can stop it, since you can’t.” He went and told my grandfather I was being arrogant. Well I was being arrogant because you wasn’t doing anything, so when I explained to my grandfather what happened, so he came back to the principal. (Laughs) The principal didn’t like me no more, (laughs) because I had done what my grandfather told me to do. He didn’t like me no more, so the girl didn’t go in my purse no more, neither. (Laughter)

**Finchum** *How did you stop her?*

**Bailey** I told her if she got back in my purse again, we going to have some disagreement. We didn’t fight. I talked to her, “You go back in my purse again, I’ve been to the office three times. He didn’t do nothing. This time, I’m going to do something, and if you go back through there again, we’re going to have a big problem. If you don’t want that big problem, you better stay out of it,” so she stayed out. I didn’t know to do that in the beginning. I thought I was doing the right thing by reporting her, and they would do something about it, but they didn’t do anything.

I said to myself, “Why didn’t I do that? Why didn’t I think to do that?” Because I was doing it the way my grandparents taught me to do it because my grandparents is the ones that reared me, even though my grandmother had an illness. I don’t know what it was. My mother let my brother and I stay at the house with my grandmother. She wanted one child to be at the house with my grandmother if something happened, and the other one to come down and report it to her, so she could get some help. That’s why we stayed with our grandparents.

**Finchum** *You were with them until he sent you to Arizona?*

**Bailey** No, I was with my grandparents until my grandmother died. When my grandmother died, my grandfather got married again. There was no way in the world I could stay with them, no, because the lady was a different lady, and I didn’t know her. I sure was still—and then I was old enough to stay with my mother. I stayed with my brother, and then I stayed with my mother after my grandmother died.

**Finchum** *In a different house, and where was it?*

**Bailey** It was down on Fourteenth Street.

**Finchum** *A little south. Still close enough to walk to school, though.*

**Bailey** Right, about three blocks from school, four blocks from school.

**Finchum** *What would you do for fun?*

**Bailey** Our parents would get together and have things for us to do. They organized things for us to do, because we were lacking nothing, but the children now are. We had a recreational center, and when urban renewal came through, they took that down.

**Finchum** *Where was it?*

**Bailey** On Eleventh Street. They put the building that we went to elementary school, they moved it over there on Eleventh Street so that was our classroom. This other building, this long building, they didn’t have no rooms, and it was an open space. When they built the wings on the school…. The wings weren’t there, so they built the wings on the school to put an auditorium, because our auditorium was in the gym. They put an auditorium, and they put the wings on and called it the classrooms.

**Finchum** *You had English, math, you had all the typical subjects?*

**Bailey** Yes.

**Finchum** *Home ec?*

**Bailey** Yes, that’s where I learned how to sew.

**Finchum** *Did you have 4-H, or FFA, Future Farmers or [New Farmers of America]?*

**Bailey** No, we didn’t have it…to my knowledge, we didn’t have it in Stillwater. The girls that came from the country, they had it because they had a school out there. When they came to Stillwater, they was a member of the 4-H because they had farm families.

**Finchum** *Would they come for high school or what grade?*

**Bailey** Yes, that’s what they came for, the high school. Yes, because the ones that I went with to elementary school was already there, lived in Stillwater.

**Finchum** *Probably grades one through eight out in the country, and then come into town for high school?*

**Bailey** No, they was one through five because when we got in the fifth grade—and the fifth grade was the last class for the elementary, then the seventh and eighth grade, then the ninth and tenth.

**Finchum** *You had a junior high kind of?*

**Bailey** Yes.

**Finchum** *Were you allowed to go downtown Stillwater?*

**Bailey** Yes.

**Finchum** *Could you go into restaurants and eat?*

**Bailey** No. Yes, we could go in there, but we would have to go in the back. I didn’t go into any one of them because my grandfather had a restaurant, so I didn’t need to. Right? So no. Mrs…. Can’t think of the lady’s name. The last year that they had the—I think it was the last year before they integrated, I think they walked on Skee’s Cafeteria.

**Finchum** *They had a sit-in?*

**Bailey** Yes.

**Finchum** *I haven’t heard of that. Where was it, Skee’s?*

**Bailey** Right there, where that martial arts, on the corner on Ninth Street, across the street.

**Finchum** *It was a restaurant?*

**Bailey** Yes, it was a restaurant.

**Finchum** *You remember it, or you were told that they did?*

**Bailey** No, I was in town when they did it. I was going to school. Yes, they walked on…. This lady from Oklahoma City, can’t think of the lady’s name, Luper.

**Finchum** *Clara.*

**Bailey** Clara Luper, yes. She came to Stillwater, and they marched on Skee’s.

**Finchum** *That’s interesting. That was the only major event dealing with that?*

**Bailey** Yes, we had crosses burned on the church yards.

**Finchum** *The KKK?*

**Bailey** Yes, we weren’t afraid of them. They just an organization. (Laughs) I always look at them like that. They sound like a gang. I said, “That’s the biggest gang in the world.” They want to call it something else, but it’s a gang, too. That’s the way I look at it. “Why are you going to be another group and you’re doing violence? And we are black and we’re not violent. You all want to say we are gangs and you all are not.” It’s just a bigger gang, that’s all. Even the Mafia is a bigger gang.

**Finchum** *Do you remember seeing them burn them?*

**Bailey** No, no, no. I didn’t see them, but they told us about it because that’s when it was down on Eleventh Street. They did two crosses down there.

**Finchum** *That was in the ʼ50s or a little earlier?*

**Bailey** I don’t know. I don’t remember.

**Finchum** *Probably earlier. What about theaters? Were you….*

**Bailey** We went to Aggie Theater. We had to go up in the balcony because we couldn’t go down in the front. The Leachman, I don’t know because I didn’t go to the Leachman. I think we was allowed to go to the Leachman, but I didn’t go to that one. I didn’t like going to movies because I didn’t like all that loudness. (Laughs) Most of my friends liked to look at those mysteries, those scary movies, and I don’t care nothing about no scary movie. You just get me out of there. (Laughs)

They persuaded me to go to see *King Kong*. I tell you, I was diving on the floor, trying to keep from seeing it because I don’t like…. It wasn’t as scary as I thought it was, but things that…. When King Kong came out, I got in the floor and when the other people came out it was the okay, then I could get up. I don’t like to see the battles, but we do it, and we see it every day. At that time, that’s the only time I went to the movies.

That was on a Halloween thing. We would have had that Halloween thing for the movies, and everybody—that place would be packed. (Laughs) There would be lines almost to the end of the street. Yes, they used to really enjoy all that kind of stuff. I didn’t, I didn’t go, but then again, some of those people, some of the kids probably couldn’t get out until then. I don’t know. I didn’t like it. My brother went to all of them. I didn’t go, I stayed home. I would go, “I’m going to stay right here.”

**Finchum** *When you came back from Arizona, after you had had your baby, did you work?*

**Bailey** Yes.

**Finchum** *Doing what? What type of work did you do?*

**Bailey** I worked taking care of my baby. My grandfather told me, (laughs) I got strict orders, “You’re going to stay here. You’re going to take care of this child until they start school. When they start school, you’re going to go and get a job. Then you’re going to be home when the kids leave to go to school, and you’re going to be at home when they get back from school.” Those were my orders. (Laughs)

**Finchum** *When you did start work, what did you do?*

**Bailey** I did hotel work. I worked at Scott-Parker in the food department. I did mostly hotel work and housework. I would babysit, and on the holidays, I helped with the dinner banquets.

**Finchum** *And then you got married later?*

**Bailey** Yeah. That was *way* down on. All of my classmates had gotten married but me. I said, “What is wrong with me?” I said, “One thing, I’m wild, and I am not ready to settle down.” (Laughs) I got married…. When did I get married? I know the day that I got married on, but I don’t know what year.

**Finchum** *How old were you?*

**Bailey** I don’t know that, either, because what happened was, I thought I was going to have a little wedding. My husband would say, he said, “Baby, get on your best dress.” I said, “What you talking about?” He said, “I want you to wear the yellow dress, what I met you in.” I said, “What are we…,” and I didn’t ask him where we were going. I thought we were going out to dinner. (Laughs) We went to Guthrie and got married at the Justice of Peace, and I was so angry. I don’t remember saying, “I do.” (Laughs) I really don’t. I always miss the date. I have to look at my marriage certificate to see it. Now, I don’t have to do that because I got a grandson that was born on the date that I got married, (laughs) so it’s branded in my brain now.

**Finchum** *The date, just not how many.*

**Bailey** Right. (Laughs) My husband drowned, and we had been married nine years. I said to myself, “I was the last one to get married of my group, and then the first one to lose my husband.” Oh my. He drowned and my girl, that’s out there waiting for me, she was with him when he drowned.

**Finchum** *In a pond or a lake?*

**Bailey** No, a lake. Lake McMurtry, that’s where it happened at. My auntie found out about it, and she said, “He’s going to come up at a certain place,” and that’s where he came up at. She told my mom not to let me go out there. I went to the hospital…. No, when the lady came and told me what had happened, I don’t know how I got up to my mom’s. My house is right next to my mom’s house, but she was in shock, too. Of course, he was a good friend of hers. I took for granted that she was in shock, that she came and told me. She was still in such shock, she got in the car and went and left, instead of her walking me over to the house where my mother was. When I got to the house where my mother was, I passed smooth out on the floor. They asked me, “Who brought you over here?” “Nobody.” “Who told you?” I told them who told me. She said, “Why didn’t she bring you over then?” I said to myself, “I don’t know,” because she could have been in shock herself because she was a very good friends of his, of hers and her husband.

**Finchum** *How many children did the two of you have?*

**Bailey** Two. He has children by his first wife, and they have been here. They have came and stayed with me.

**Finchum** *You had three total children?*

**Bailey** No, I have three older children.

**Finchum** *Okay, I’m missing….*

**Bailey** I have Michael, Iris, and Keith, my three oldest children. When we got married, he accepted my children as his. I used to be the physical disciplinarian. He said, “You going to stop that.” I did. He said, “You need to talk to them.” I told him, I said, “Sometimes these kids don’t want to listen,” but since he was there, they did, so I didn’t have to be the physical disciplinarian anymore. I kind of missed him, because this one right here, my baby girl, they were reared by him because I was working in the preschool program. So for nine months, he took care of them because he was a disabled veteran, and for three months I took care of them. He was not supposed to be working, but he said, “I cannot stay here, holding my hands. I’m a worker, and I cannot—I was trained to work.” He would go out, and do one or two yards, or something like that to keep him busy.

**Finchum** *Was he from Stillwater?*

**Bailey** No, he was from Arkansas.

**Finchum** *Okay, so he moved to Stillwater?*

**Bailey** Yes, because I was working, he wasn’t. I wasn’t moving to no Arkansas. I enjoyed it, I’ve been down there, but no.

**Finchum** *What keeps you in Stillwater? What’s the pull? It’s just home?*

**Bailey** Home, and I love it here. If the Lord called me and tells me to go somewhere else, I would, but other than that, no. I can go visit other places and come back home, but really, I stayed around here because of my mom, when she was living. Now, I don’t have no hold to me now.

**Finchum** *A lot of memories, though.*

**Bailey** Yes, because this place was country. Stillwater was country at that time.

**Finchum** *The roads probably weren’t paved, when you’re talking about.*

**Bailey** Right, they weren’t paved until urban renewal came through.

**Finchum** *Did you have running water? You said you had running water and electricity.*

**Bailey** Yes. One of the ladies that my grandfather rented to, she told me, she said, “Gloria.” I said, “What?” She said, “Do you know that your grandfather was the first one to have running water in the home?” When he got running water in his home, he went and put running water in all his houses that he had. She said, “Another thing, your grandfather was the only one that had an inside bathroom,” so he put an inside bathroom in all his houses.

**Finchum** *Okay, so he had the luxuries?*

**Bailey** Yes, but one of my friends said, “Gloria, we used to think you was rich, you all was rich because you was in that big house on the corner.” I said, “What are you talking about?” I said, “I guess you needed to be a fly on the wall. If you had known what was going on in that house, you would change your mind.” (Laughs) Everything that looks good on the outside is not always good because my grandmother had to struggle. You know how life goes, when some problem comes up. Yes, so you’d need to be a fly on the wall, and you really can see what’s going on in my house.

**Finchum** *Would she have a garden, your grandmother?*

**Bailey** My grandmother had a garden. That was her garden. My grandfather had one, two, three gardens. He had one on Tenth Street, on the west side of the Methodist church, when the Methodist church was down there, and that had his sweet potatoes and his corn. The one on Eleventh and Knoblock, on the east side, had his beans, carrots, radishes, and greens, and cabbage. I don’t know what else he had in it, but he had a lot of stuff in there. The other one that was between the two, because there’s a house on this side and a house on this side, he had a garden there. I don’t know what he had in it but it was up in there. We didn’t grow watermelons.

**Finchum** *So she spent a lot of time canning?*

**Bailey** Yes, and I loved it because whenever the people from the country were bringing the peaches, and the apples, and things, she would get that. We would start peeling and going on, and then putting them in, and cutting them up, and she would can it about as soon as she would get it, so yes. We had a lot of canned foods, and we stayed healthy.

My mother had a garden down there between those two houses, and she used to can, too. I watched it, but I didn’t can. I didn’t do no canning. I just helped her put the stuff in the jars, and when it comes to that pressure cooker, I was a little afraid of that thing, because (laughs) we had a minister come in from out of town. I don’t know what he was doing. Really, I don’t know what he was doing. Anyway, the pastor of our church called my mother and said, “Do you have a room that you could spare?” She said, “What’s up?” He told her, and she said, “Yes. I can fix one,” because this minister, and his wife, and his child came in. They needed a place to stay, so she fixed it up, and they came and stayed there with my mom and us.

The next morning, he got up, he went over to the Church of God in Christ, right across, diagonal across the street from us. I don’t remember what the mother and that boy do, didn’t care. Anyway, then he went up to Mt. Zion, because the pastor’s house was next door to the church. He came back, all dressed, all docked down with a blue suit on, and tie, and new kicks, and new shirt, and said, “Look what I got!” The Lord knew what was going on, we didn’t. As he started going—then of course, she had the pressure cooker on because she was cooking. I don’t know what she was cooking in that pressure cooker that morning. It was on a Sunday morning. He went through. There was three ladies in that kitchen, and they were all close to him when he went through there. That lid came off that pressure cooker, and didn’t nothing get on nobody but him. He said, “The Lord’s in this place,” and he never showed back up. Now he had been coming two years straight.

The third year, he didn’t come. I guess he was scamming. I don’t know what he was doing, but he didn’t come back to Stillwater and do that no more because the Lord blessed him with a suit and everything. (Laughs) He went over to the Church of God in Christ, and I don’t know whether he got money over there or what. Anyway, that man never showed back up because he had been coming every year. I guess he had been going to the church, doing all this…. I don’t know whether he had be doing this all his life or not. I don’t know, but he didn’t come back to Stillwater.

**Finchum** *That pressure cooker got him.*

**Bailey** Yes, the pressure cooker got him, but the lid didn’t hit him. It was the food that she was cooking in the thing. The lid popped up and went back down.

**Finchum** *How had she learned to do that? Did they have homemaker clubs?*

**Bailey** No, they had…. Her mother.

**Finchum** *Her mother taught her?*

**Bailey** Yes, and I don’t know how her mother learned how to do it.

**Finchum** *They had some homemaker clubs back then, but I don’t know that every community had them. They taught them things like that.*

**Bailey** Yes, she had the mother that taught all her kids. Like with me, I taught all my kids to sew, except the last two.

**Finchum** *When you were learning to sew at the high school, did they have—was it the treadle machine, with the pedal?*

**Bailey** Yes, they had both. We didn’t get on the electric one too much until they…. I think it was the last year that I went to school there that they had the ones that you could do that with.

**Finchum** *Did you make your own patterns, or would you have to buy them?*

**Bailey** We bought our patterns. When I took a class at the co-op, they showed us how to do the patterns.

**Finchum** *Where would you get your fabric?*

**Bailey** We had to go to the store to get our fabrics.

**Finchum** *In downtown Stillwater?*

**Bailey** Yes.

**Finchum** *There was a mercantile, or J. C. Penney’s, or whatever?*

**Bailey** No, it was Fry’s, because he had a fabric shop. You could go down to, not J. C. Penney’s, what is it, Woolworth’s and get material.

**Finchum** *Stillwater had a Woolworth, okay. Where was it in town?*

**Bailey** Down there, across on Eighth Street, between Eighth and Seventh, on the east side.

**Finchum** *It was south, okay. The public library, not this one, but the other public library was up on Sixth. Did you get to go there?*

**Bailey** Yes, because when I was teaching, it was still there

[Break at 1:21:18]

**Bailey** I’ve got to tell you about Georgia Johnson’s pie shop.

**Finchum** *Georgia Johnson’s Pie Shop?*

**Bailey** Yes, it was on Tenth Street.

**Finchum** *That would have been a favorite place of mine.*

**Bailey** Yes, it was the favorite place of a lot of people. She sold hamburgers and other stuff there, too, but she had more pies than anything else. My mother did a lot of baking, too. She baked for the community, like if one of the church members wanted a cake, or some cookies, or a pie, and they would request a pie, whatever it was, she would bake it for them. Yes, she loved to bake. She loved gardening, and baking, and fishing. (Laughter)

**Finchum** *Inside and outside. Of these places and businesses that were open in your youth, when did they start fading away and closing down?*

**Bailey** When Miss Georgia Johnson’s niece came and took her to Tulsa, I guess she got ill or something. I knew she was ill, but I didn’t know how ill she was. Her niece came and got her, and took her to Tulsa, and put her in a nursing home. Miss Lena Andrews, she died. Mama Lucy moved from where she was to another home, when urban renewal came through, so she didn’t continue her, what do you call it, with the place for the youth. Mr. Big Boy Brown, I mean Mr. Big Boy Cook, he died. Mr. Big Boy Brown, where they had that place, where the kids would go in the daytime, and dance and whatever, he also had a barbecue place, and he died. Most of these people died. Mr. Leo Carter, he died.

**Finchum** *No one took over what they were doing?*

**Bailey** No.

**Finchum** *The barber shops?*

**Bailey** No, the only one that took over—of course, we had our barber shop. There were three or four barbers there that took over each—when one would leave, the other one come in.

**Finchum** *When all this was happening, was that in the ʼ60s?*

**Bailey** Yes, the late ʼ60s and ʼ70s.

**Finchum** *Integration, and segregation, and all that may have played a part?*

**Bailey** I don’t know. The building, our restaurant caught on fire, so that ended that.

**Finchum** *Didn’t rebuild?*

**Bailey** Didn’t rebuild. My grandfather’s sister was—my aunties and my uncles, he was trying to establish whether or not they wanted it, in case of his death. They said they didn’t want it because they wasn’t coming back to Stillwater. They wouldn’t come back to Stillwater to live, so he sold that to urban renewal. Down on Fourteenth Street, he had three houses there that he sold to urban renewal.

**Finchum** *Urban renewal, so that was—I have to go back and look at what dates that was.*

**Bailey** I don’t know what date that was.

**Finchum** *I don’t know. I’ll go back and look.*

**Bailey** It was in the ʼ80s, I think.

**Finchum** *So things started to change then.*

**Bailey** Right, it might have been in the late ʼ70s and the early ʼ80s.

**Finchum** *Is the community as a whole as tight as it once was?*

**Bailey** No. When urban renewal came through, it split. It split the community, so everybody went. (Swish) We scattered, so they in all parts of town. When it was a community as a whole, it kind of helped. It was kind of like the Church of Israel, (laughs) when they left Egypt. When they got to their land, they split. That’s kind of what we did. We still have some. We have one, two, three, four, five, about seven or eight families still in the area, but it was—that community was knitted together. All the houses, after urban renewal came through they spread the houses out because the housing grew. When it was a community, it was a community because it was tight.

That would have been between Eleventh and…. Don’t know, between Knoblock and Hester, there was many houses. Yes, because there was a house where the pastor study was. That’s what they called the house, the pastor study. It was the house up there, where the pastor lived, then the church on Eleventh. Then, where my daughter lives and there was a house between there. The study, the church, the house my daughter in, another house there, and Mr. Carter’s house, and then another house, and then another house, and then this church on the corner. There was that many houses in that area, in that one block. There was a house behind the house, so we knew how to develop a community. (Laughs)

**Finchum** *And then you had your own grocery stores, and your own churches, and pretty much could sustain yourself within that boundary. What about medical services?*

**Bailey** My grandmother was my doctor. Where we lived, the doctors used to come to the house. The white doctors came to the house.

**Finchum** *Interesting.*

**Bailey** Right, they make home visits. I’m thinking that that’s going to eventually go back to that.

**Finchum** *Would they deliver babies at home?*

**Bailey** Yes.

**Finchum** *Would they?*

**Bailey** Yes, they sure did.

**Finchum** *Did you have particular bankers that you would…. If you needed financial money….*

**Bailey** My grandfather did because he—my grandfather was a strange person though. He would have…. (Laughs) Really, he was. He was a strange person because I don’t know whether this man was his banker or not, but he wasn’t in the bank. He would go to an individual to hold his money, I think, because whenever I would go with him, he would say, “I’ve got to go talk and this man,” and when he come back, he had some money. I don’t know whether this individual person was his banker or not. (Laughs)

**Finchum** *He didn’t trust the regular banks.*

**Bailey** (Laughs) It was somebody I guess he got friendly with when he first came to Oklahoma, and they became friends. He might have been a banker at that time. It might have been a president of a bank or something, and so they got to be friends, and then he….

**Finchum** *Was he black or white?*

**Bailey** He was white. No, he wasn’t white. He was mixed. I don’t know whether he was German, I don’t know whether he was a Jew because my grandfather congregated around the Jews because you know Katz Department Store?

**Finchum** *Yes.*

**Bailey** Mr. Katz was a Jew, and this other man I think was a Jew, and I think it might have been Mr. Katz’s brother. I’m just—the facial expressions. Anyway, I found out that—my grandfather told me that Mr. Katz was a Jew, so this other guy looked like him, he had some Jewish look on him. Yes, he clinged to those people.

**Finchum** *Your grandfather had some Irish?*

**Bailey** Yes, he’s part Irish. My grandmother’s Indian, but I don’t know from what tribe, because she didn’t talk about it.

**Finchum** *Was she a little lighter?*

**Bailey** My grandmother, she came from Texas, and everybody that come from Texas and come to Oklahoma, they get dark. Longer they stay in Oklahoma, they get darker, and darker, and darker. Now, if they were born in Oklahoma, that’s a different thing. My grandfather—my mother was a little light-skinned, and my auntie was dark-skinned.

**Finchum** *Sisters?*

**Bailey** Yes, and my uncle was light-skinned. My auntie, the dark-skinned auntie said that she was…. I don’t know. I think it was, I’m thinking, a color thing. (Laughs) She was the darkest one of the family, and she didn’t think she belonged. I don’t know what she did, but she couldn’t do nothing. She was always sick all the time, so my grandfather babied her, and she got anything she wanted. My mother had to work hard, because the oldest one has to take care of the younger one.

How can you make another child that’s cantankerous do would you say to do, and my auntie was very cantankerous, she was. She told me one time, she said…. After my grandfather died, she came into the house, and she was very hot. She was all geared up to start arguments, and fussing, and going on, and I said, “Look here, you’re not going in there. My mama is not feeling good, and you’re not going in this house, not where she is. You can stay in here with me, but you’re not going in there where she is. She’s sick, and you’re not going in to upset her.” She said, “Yes, I am!” I said, “No, you are not. You are going to have to knock me over out of this door for you to go through here with me.”

She got upset with me, she went over—she lived next door to my mother. She went over there, because that’s where her husband was. She said, “My niece will not let me go in there to see my sister.” I said, “No, not to…,” and so my Uncle Lin came over and talked to me. I said, “The way your wife was, no. No, she wasn’t going up to see my mama when my mama wasn’t feeling good, no. Nobody was.” Later on, she told me, “You know what?” I said, “What?” “You’re meaner than I am.” I said, “I had a good teacher,” (Laughs) I said, “Between you and my mama.” My mama was not a speak—what do you call it, she didn’t talk when she got upset, she just watched. She didn’t start nothing, she just kind of watched. If their hand go up, she’d clunk them, because she don’t know whether they going to hit or not, and they’re out. (Laughs) She would wait until they made the first move, and then that’s when she’d get busy.

**Finchum** *What did she do for a living?*

**Bailey** She was…. What do they call them? They call them domestic persons. She worked in the homes.

**Finchum** *A domestic worker?*

**Bailey** Yes, and she loved it because she worked for professional people. Yes, she worked for Mr. Jones, who used to be at the University, at OSU, and she worked for [Guy Horton]. He was a lawyer. She worked for Grimsley, she was a schoolteacher. She worked for—what was her name before she married, Mrs. Carpenter? I forget what her name was. Anyway, she worked for them, and she was a social worker, so she worked with all kinds of people, yes.

When they—during the holidays, like Thanksgiving, and Christmas, and maybe Easter, or Mother’s Day as we call it, she would go and cater foods for them. She worked for [Harley Thomas], the [family] that had owned the Ford [dealership]. She worked for professional people, and she took me along with her. I learned all the trades that she had and all the trades my grandfather had. I can put up paneling, I can paint, I can change locks on doors, I can change screens, if your screen was messed up. I can do all of that, yes.

**Finchum** *You’re a handy person.*

**Bailey** Right, because I followed somebody that knew what to do, and I just watched because they wouldn’t let me do it. The only thing I didn’t learn how to do is thread a pipe because he used to thread his own pipes. When he was ready to replace a pipe under the ground, he thread his own pipes.

**Finchum** *You could probably figure it out, sounds like.*

**Bailey** Yes, at the time, those two were full—I was still small. I stayed small until I was twenty-four years old, maybe. No, when did I meet my husband? It took me…. The lady next door and her husband, from where my mother lived on Fourteenth Street, they made a bet that my brother was older than I was. (Laughs) He lost because he didn’t know that I’m a year older than my brother. They made another bet that I didn’t weigh over a hundred pounds, and so he lost again. I had just made the hundred-pound mark, and I think I was eighteen years old. I stayed small a long time. When I got married is when I started gaining weight.

**Finchum** *When you started having kids, too?*

**Bailey** No, my first three kids, I was still small. I was making my own clothes, and after I got married, I stopped making clothes. I started getting heavier, and I felt shame because I gained all that weight, so I didn’t make any more clothes. I made them for my daughter. My oldest daughter, the teacher told me, she said, “Gloria, your daughter’s the only one that looks all—always had something new on all the time.” I sewed, and all her school clothes was made. I made all her school clothes. Only thing I had to do was buy her shoes, and she had some feet on her.

I have small feet, but she got some big ones. My two sons knew how to sew. I taught them how to sew, yes, because I always looked at it like this, “You going to be a bachelor before you going to be a husband, so you need to know how to take care of yourself. You get a hole in your pants, or a hole in your shirt, a button fall off or something like that, you need to know how to sew it on. You going to take to the cleaners, and have them sew it, that’s going to cost you. You can do it yourself.”

**Finchum** *Did you teach them to cook, too?*

**Bailey** My mother taught them to cook. I didn’t like kitchen work. All I did was clean up. My son and my mom, my brother and my mom, they loved to cook. My youngest son, he was five years old, I think. I wouldn’t get up that morning to go and fix him breakfast. I was going to get up, but I would get up when I wanted to. When I found him, he was in the sink. He had on boots, though, had the hot water on, and he was cooking him something to eat, getting some water to cook him some food with. He had Malt-O-Meal, but he was standing up in the sink, in the hot water. (Laughter)

He scared me to death. I said, “That woke me up.” I didn’t try to sleep in no more after I found my child in the sink, (laughs) and the hot water on. I said, “Boy, you…,” and he has been cooking ever since, and they like to barbecue. I like to barbecue now. I can cook, but I don’t care to cook. I would rather barbecue than to cook inside because my mama said, “You’re not going to leave this house without knowing how to cook.” It’s not that I don’t know how, I just don’t want to.

**Finchum** *You don’t have to.*

**Bailey** When I married my husband, I didn’t know I didn’t have to. I cooked for him for five years or three and a half years. Found out, he was barbecuing every weekend, but I didn’t—me and barbecue, barbecue in the house didn’t click, so he used to fuss, he used to be confused. When men like to look at the game, they want something to snack on. I cooked just what we going to eat, and that’s all. Once that’s gone, there’s no more. (Laughs) He said, “Baby, I sure wish you would cook some more because that.…” I said, “I don’t like leftover, and I don’t want to have to be the one to have to eat the leftover.” That was my thing if I would cook more, I would have to eat the leftovers because I didn’t see him eating it. I just saw me eating it. He did eat. He would have ate them if I cooked them, but I didn’t know that. All I could see was me eating them. He started making statements about, “You don’t cook enough food. You’re not cooking enough food,” and then he would give me the money to go buy the food, and it wouldn’t be enough.

I said, “He’s talking about me not cooking enough, and he don’t give me enough money to go buy the food.” I said, “I know what I’m going to do. I’m going to take you to the store with me the next time I go. I’m going to let him do the shopping for the food and see what he does.” Took him the next month to shop for food. That basket was—we needed two baskets. When he gave me the money to go buy it myself, there was room in the basket, but when he did it, it was different. I said, “This is good. I’m going to let him do it now.” (Laughs) The next time I cooked, I said, “I tell you what. I’m going to let you start cooking. You can cook for yourself. Since I don’t cook enough, you can cook for me,” and he started doing that.

One day, we were playing cards one day with another couple, and when I left out of the room, he was telling this lady about, “My wife used to cook for me, now she don’t.” She said, “Do you want me to talk to her?” “No! It isn’t that she didn’t cook. It’s that she did cook, but it wasn’t enough. No, don’t do that.” (Laughs) Later on, she told me about it. I said, “He cooks better than I do,” and from that day on, he did all the cooking until he died. He sure did and was the best nurse in the world. Too good for me, because I didn’t want to take the medicine. He said, “Yes, you are,” and I have to take this nasty medicine, and he made sure that I got it. If I go to sleep, he made sure that he would wake me up on time for me to take that medicine. He was a very good nurse, so I didn’t have to worry about that.

He had me spoiled because I didn’t have to go shopping for clothing. He would go out and buy clothing for me. We would go to Oklahoma City to shop, and he liked sports. That’s where he’s going to hit first. He’s going to the sport area first and buy all the reels, and the places to put all the reels and everything, and the sporting stuff he needs. He’s going to get all that. Then he’s going to shop for me, and the kids, and my mom.

**Finchum** *Fishing comes first?*

**Bailey** Right, because what he did was the old fishing things that he had, he would take them to Arkansas, and give them to his friends down there, all his family. Then, he got new because he didn’t keep the equipment. He passed it on to somebody else to use.

**Finchum** *Sounds like you have had an interesting life.*

**Bailey** Yes, but it was a short interesting life, but I appreciate it. He did some things that wasn’t so good, but overall, he was a very good man. I had to take the bad with the good…

**Finchum** *We all do, don’t we?*

**Bailey** …and wipe all that bad stuff out, and take the good, yes. I miss him, too, but he’s in Heaven. He came to know Christ.

**Finchum** *That says something, too.*

**Bailey** Right, he was a deacon at his church in Arkansas, but he became an usher in Stillwater.

**Finchum** *He came to like Stillwater, it sounds like, too?*

**Bailey** Well now, he wasn’t going to leave me. (Laughs)

**Finchum** *Not necessarily the town, just you.*

**Bailey** He told me I was his jewel because I was different from—he was involved with three, two other women. I don’t know how many other women he was involved with, because he was in the Korean War. I don’t know what else he did over there. He said I was his jewel, so I really didn’t think he knew what he was talking about, because I sure didn’t feel that way. (Laughs) I thought I was a mess. (Laughs)

**Finchum** *I don’t know, I think you’re doing great. When you first started voting, did you have any trouble with getting to do that because of your race?*

**Bailey** No.

**Finchum** *Have any thoughts of our first black president?*

**Bailey** Not particularly.

**Finchum** *Okay, just checking.*

**Bailey** I knew that he was going into a mess because the government is always messed up. All through all the years, it’s been run down, and I said to myself, “He’s going to catch it.” You can’t do all the stuff in four years for yourself as the president, as you would if it was all cleared up and settled down, where you had to do one year to clean up the stuff that’s already there, but you got to have…. You almost have to do the whole four years.

**Finchum** *Then he got four more.*

**Bailey** Yes, but the important point is he didn’t quite get it all done, either...

**Finchum** *That’s true.*

**Bailey** …because he was always stopped. I didn’t think I was going to ever see a black president.

**Finchum** *A lot of people didn’t. Do you remember when JFK was killed?*

**Bailey** Yes.

**Finchum** *He was an important part for the….*

**Bailey** Yes, and I think he was one of the best presidents. I really do because he was trying to cut down all this stuff. But you know what, the one that’s trying to stop all this stuff is the one that gets assassinated, is what I see.

**Finchum** *Martin Luther King, too.*

**Bailey** Yes, the one that doing good for everybody, for the whole United States, they’re the one that gets stopped, but there’s Dr. King. They think they stopped him, but you live after death. It’s not you that’s doing it. You live after death, even though you’re not here. You live after death because look at it now. He’s still flying. (Laughs) Yes, he’s still flying, and so is JFK.

**Finchum** *I would agree.*

**Bailey** Yes, you can’t stop what God put in place. I don’t care. You could knock them all off, you could kill every one of them, but that spirit still going to flow. It’s going to fly, and then you’re going to wish you had let him stay alive, then he might not have been important, though, he might not have been so verbal. (Laughs) You think about, “Maybe if I hadn’t have killed him, we wouldn’t have all this flying around now.” Sometimes when you’re living, you don’t talk as much, but when you’re dead, you talk a lot. That’s what I’m seeing these days that I have been living.

We had a pastor that we had at Mt. Zion, died this month. Reverend Dallas, Willard Dallas, and he was real good. He was a very good minister. The last time he came here for a three-day revival, he told us that he may not be here. I went to that home going, it was not a home going. It was a celebration, and that celebration was a celebration. That’s what it was, a celebration. First time I ever seen a funeral like that, service like—and I won’t call it a funeral, a service like that. It was good. No tears, all joy, yes, because he smiled all the time. When he was in the school system, he smiled all the time. Every time you see him, he was smiling, because he was my, what is it, father in the ministry. Out of all the ministers that I have had going to Mt. Zion, he was my father in the ministry. This was his first church, Mt. Zion was his first church.

**Finchum** *How long was he there?*

**Bailey** He was there fifteen years.

**Finchum** *That’s pretty good, so he got to know you pretty well.*

**Bailey** (Laughs) My mother used to…. On Wednesday night—we would fast all day Wednesday until after they have prayer service, and then they have dinner. My mother was the cook for a while. The first lady was Miss Ruth Barnes that started it all. She died, and my mother took it up, and we would go to this house. My mother would have food all…. She spread out, table spread. She had a long table, little bit longer than this, in the living room, and had it all set up and everything. All they have to do is come sit down and get served. She did that until…. I don’t know how long she did that, yes.

**Finchum** *Funerals were a little bit different back then, too.*

**Bailey** Yes, and one of the few I didn’t get to go to, that was [Kermit] Shinault, and he had a musical service. He didn’t want no preaching over his service. He wanted music, and since he was a pianist and an organist, that’s what he had. I didn’t go because my car wasn’t up to par to go to nowhere, but other than that…. We have had some—no, at Mt. Zion when we were down, I think we were down here on Eleventh, and we cut a record, the choir recorded a record. Either, it was ones of the first years we got up to the new church, they cut a record.

**Finchum** *Good gospel songs. Did you have a favorite?*

**Bailey** “Peace Be Still,” yes, “Peace Be Still.”

**Finchum** *Can you sing a little bit?*

**Bailey** No, I’m not a singer.

**Finchum** *Okay, I’m just checking!*

**Bailey** I can sing, but I can’t sing that.

**Finchum** *“Peace Be Still,” I’m not sure I’ve heard that.*

**Bailey** Yes, because of the pianist was George Davis, and he sung the lead part.

**Finchum** *I’ll have to look it up. I’ve not heard of it. I like, “I’ll Fly Away.”*

**Bailey** Yes, you do fly away. You don’t think you fly away, but when you leave this, when the breath come out of us, it goes back to the Giver. We don’t realize that the Giver gave us our breath, or we would be zombies. No, we would be statues with no breath, so I have to thank Him for that.

**Finchum** *I think that’s probably a good place to stop. We thank you for that, too, because you have shared with us today. Without that, we wouldn’t be able to. Anything else you want to add before we shut off?*

**Bailey** No.

**Finchum** *My last question is to have you tell me, how do you want to be remembered?*

**Bailey** How do I want to be remembered? As a quiet person that you would have to see me in order to know me. (Laughs)

**Finchum** *I thank you for sharing with us.*

**Bailey** I learned how to talk when I went into Head Start. When I went to the preschool service, that’s when I—I used to be shy. Now that the Lord had opened up my mouth, I’ve been running it ever since. (Laughter)

**Finchum** *Thank you for running it today!*

**Bailey** Okay, I hope I answered all of your questions.

**------- *End of interview*** *-------*