**Oral History Interview**

**with**

**Mary Lois Wiley**

Interview Conducted by

Tanya Finchum and Stacy DeLano

March 28, 2017

Spotlighting Oklahoma

Oral History Project

**Oklahoma Oral History Research Program**

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**Interview History**

Interviewers: Tanya Finchum and Stacy DeLano

Transcriber: Lauren Gray

Editors: Tanya Finchum

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 Mary Lois Wiley is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on March 28, 2017.

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**About Mary Lois Wiley…**

Mary “Lois” Wiley was born in 1927 in Okmulgee County, Oklahoma. During her youth, Lois lived in several different locations and attended numerous schools but she still considers Okmulgee County home. After she married the first time, Lois moved with her husband to Tulsa, Oklahoma. She worked at St. John Hospital and lived in Tulsa for about two years before moving to Oklahoma City. During that time the marriage ended and Lois was employed as a cook at Classen Cafeteria which was owned by the O’Mealeys.

After Lois remarried, she joined her new husband in 1956 in Stillwater, Oklahoma. Soon after arriving in Stillwater she began a forty-two year career as a cook for Oklahoma State University sorority houses. Thirty-nine of those years were with Gamma Phi Beta. Lois retired in 1997 from the sorority and continued to work a few more years in a local nursing home before completely retiring.

Lois lived many years in the Washington School neighborhood where her children attended. She is a longtime member of Lawson Temple Church of God in Christ. Lois has served in numerous roles in the church, has enjoyed traveling to church conferences outside of Oklahoma, and continues to attend services as often as possible.

**About Washington School**

Washington School, named for Booker T. Washington, in Stillwater, Oklahoma, was the first African American school in the area. Initially the school served grades first through eighth but later expanded to include grades ninth through twelfth. The 1954 Supreme Court Case Brown v. Board of Education led to the integration of Washington School students into the Stillwater Public Schools system in 1956. The school played an integral role in the surrounding African American community for the duration of the school and continues to have a special bond with former students, parents of students and the community in general. Stillwater’s African Americans and Washington School oral history project hopes to help document the important place the school had in the life of the local community. The project is a collaboration between Oklahoma State University’s Edmon Low Library and the Stillwater Public Library with the assistance of community members Gloria and Aretha Bailey.

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| **Mary Lois Wiley**  Oral History Interview  Interviewed by Tanya Finchum  & Stacy DeLano  March 28, 2017  Stillwater, Oklahoma | **C:\Users\ftanya\Desktop\DSC_0052.jpg** |

**Finchum** *Today is March 28, 2017. My name is Tanya Finchum. I’m with Oklahoma State University, and today I am in Stillwater to interview Mary Lois Wiley. You go by Lois as I understand it, so thank you for having us. And along with me today is Stacy DeLano with the Stillwater Public Library. So, let’s begin with learning when and where you were born.*

**Wiley** I was born in Okmulgee County, a little suburb called Tolan.

**Finchum** *And what year?*

**Wiley** Nineteen twenty-seven.

**Finchum** *Nineteen twenty-seven.*

**Wiley** Nineteen twenty-seven, yeah.

**Finchum** *And what were your parents doing in Okmulgee County?*

**Wiley** They were farmers.

**Finchum** *Had they been born there?*

**Wiley** No, my father from Arkansas, and my mother from Texas.

**Finchum** *Well then, how did they meet?*

**Wiley** Well, my mother came here I think in 1900, and my father came here from Arkansas in 1890-something.

**Finchum** *Okay. And what did they farm?*

**Wiley** They farmed out east in Okmulgee County, a little town called Beggs.

**Finchum** *Beggs?*

**Wiley** Beggs. B-E-G-G-S.

**Finchum** *Beggs, okay. I’ve heard of that. I’m not sure where it is, but I’ve heard of it.*

**Wiley** Yeah, it’s out on Highway 16, between Okmulgee and…. It’s about fourteen miles [northwest] of Okmulgee [and about six miles east of Slick, Oklahoma].

**Finchum** *And did you have brothers and sisters?*

**Wiley** I had three brothers and seven sisters.

**Finchum** *That’s a big house. (Laughs)*

**Wiley** Yeah, it’s a big family.

**Finchum** *And where did you fall in the order?*

**Wiley** I was fourth. I’m the fourth child, the second daughter.

**Finchum** *So you got to call the shots a little bit sometimes?*

**Wiley** Yes. (Laughter)

**Finchum** *Well, did your mother have a big garden?*

**Wiley** Yeah, she’d have a big garden every year.

**Finchum** *And canned and all of that?*

**Wiley** Yeah, canned all through the summer.

**Finchum** *And you’d have to help with that?*

**Wiley** Yeah, we helped in everything. (Laughter)

**Finchum** *Had a few chores.*

**Wiley** Yes.

**Finchum** *Did she raise chickens?*

**Wiley** Yes, she had chickens. She had a whole lot of chickens.

**Finchum** *And whose job was it to get them ready for dinner?*

**Wiley** Yeah. (Laughs)

**Finchum** *Did she do it, or did your dad do the, when they chopped their heads off?*

**Wiley** Oh, my mother did.

**Finchum** *She did? I’ve asked that question a lot, and I get mixed. Most of the time it is the woman that has to do that.*

**Wiley** Yes, yeah.

**Finchum** *Well, were you born at home?*

**Wiley** I was born at home.

**Finchum** *Were the others?*

**Wiley** Yeah, they were born at home except the last ones. They was born in the hospital, the last two sisters.

**Finchum** *And when someone got sick, would the doctor come out to the place or…*

**Wiley** I don’t remember any of us being sick. My brother, I had a brother, he had a kind of asthma, but he never went [to the hospital]. My mother always took care of that. [She had home remedies. I never had no broken bones or sickness, only a few winter colds.]

**Finchum** *No broken bones or anything like that?*

**Wiley** No, never was sick.

**Finchum** *Did she have home remedies?*

**Wiley** Yes. (Laughter)

**Finchum** *Do you remember one in particular?*

**Wiley** Well, when we have a flu or something, we take brewery tea. Get a weed out in the country, and what you do is we make tea out of it, put a little lemon in it, and next morning we be all right.

**Finchum** *Did it taste good or bad?*

**Wiley** It was good, it wasn’t bad. Tasted like tea.

**Finchum** *Well, was church an important part of the family life back then?*

**Wiley** Not too good, but eventually was. The church was after we moved to Wagoner County. We lived in Wagoner County most of our lives.

**Finchum** *That’s pretty close to Okmulgee County, isn’t it?*

**Wiley** Yeah, it connected down there by Porter.

**Finchum** *Okay, I was thinking they might have.*

**Wiley** By Porter, Oklahoma, by Muskogee County.

**Finchum** *Well, where did you go to elementary school?*

**Wiley** I started in Gibson Station, in Wagoner County, little place up there by Wagoner, in Wagoner County, in a school named Gibson Station.

**Finchum** *And how many were in your class group?*

**Wiley** Oh, I can’t recall. It was quite a few. I’d say about fifteen or twenty.

**Finchum** *Okay, that’s quite a few.*

**Wiley** Yeah, at the time.

**Finchum** *And how would you get to school?*

**Wiley** We walked to school. Sometimes we walked at least two miles.

**Finchum** *One way?*

**Wiley** Yes, that’s when I first started, two miles, but further on—I went to thirteen different schools. We just moved around, different places. One time we had about five miles of a walk, but we didn’t go. We went about twelve days that year. The whole year, only about twelve days. That was out here by Broken Arrow and Coweta.

**Finchum** *You moved around because of the farming, mostly?*

**Wiley** Yeah.

**Finchum** *Well, would your dad plow with horses or mules?*

**Wiley** He had horses at first. Eventually, we bought a farm down by Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, Broken Arrow and Coweta, and we had a tractor then. We got a tractor.

**Finchum** *Did you have to drive or get to drive it?*

**Wiley** No, I never did drive a tractor.

**Finchum** *Well, with six brothers, I guess that was….*

**Wiley** No, it was three brothers, and when my brothers—by that time there was a war going on, and my brothers was in the Army. We had to help my dad. I just had one brother kind of down my age. My two older brothers, they was the second, they was the third kid. I had my older sister, then my two brothers, then me. My two brothers, they had gone to the Army, so we girls had to help my father farm. That’s when I helped, plowing and planting and do all that farm work. We had a big pecan orchard and we had to pick up pecans and stuff like that. We raised hogs and pigs off our farm.

**Finchum** *They pretty much managed to survive based on what you grew?*

**Wiley** Yes.

**Finchum** *Have a milk cow?*

**Wiley** Yeah, we had to milk about three cows every day.

**Finchum** *And is that easy to do, or not?*

**Wiley** Yeah, it’s easy. (Laughter)

**Finchum** *I have tried it once, and it didn’t work for me.*

**Wiley** We had a cow a piece to milk every morning and in the evening.

**Finchum** *Well, what was the favorite thing that your mother cooked for you?*

**Wiley** We love chicken and dumplings. (Laughs) Chicken and dumplings and all our vegetables in the garden, mustard greens, cabbages, and just stuff like that.

**Finchum** *With that many in the family, how many cans would she try to do in a season?*

**Wiley** During that time, we run about fifteen hundred cans and stuff. Big gallons of green beans, all that vegetables and stuff. Canned everything. Canned our beef.

**Finchum** *Meat?*

**Wiley** Yeah.Take beef and cook it, and make jelly and all that stuff. We had a whole lot of hogs, so we raise a whole lot of hogs, and we never had to go to the store. Only time we went to the store for something was like salt, baking powder, and sugar, something like that, but all the other stuff, we raising.

**Finchum** *And would your mother sell the eggs, or…*

**Wiley** Yes.

**Finchum** *…trade them for something else, I guess? Well, did she make your clothes?*

**Wiley** Yes. Made all our clothes, or almost all of them.

**Finchum** *Did she have one of those machines with the treadle, or whatever they call those?*

**Wiley** Yeah, a sewing machine.

**Finchum** *Yeah, with the pedals.*

**Wiley** Yeah.

**Finchum** *Where would she get her fabric?*

**Wiley** In town, she’d go to the store.

**Finchum** *And did she quilt with the scraps?*

**Wiley** Yes. We had quilts. We had quilts and sheets and stuff, blankets and all that stuff, she made it.

**Finchum** *Well, I would imagine laundry day was quite a chore with that many.*

**Wiley** We washed on a rubboard, and eventually we got our washing machine.

**Finchum** *That was a happy day, I bet.*

**Wiley** Yes.

**Finchum** *Well, did the house always have electricity?*

**Wiley** No, not always.

**Finchum** *Well, when you were younger, how would you do your homework? Did you have to do it before dark?*

**Wiley** No, we did it at night. Coming in from school we had our chores to do, get wood in for the night, feed the chickens, just different things. We’d cleanup new ground, cleanup ground. Like there’s a thicket of rural woods or something like that, we chopped the wood, the trees down, and cleaned up and next year we’d have it to cultivate, cultivate, plant stuff like that. We had a 100-acre farm, but there was trees and stuff on some of it. So we get them trees and things out, and eventually we made it all to cultivation.

**Finchum** *A lot of hard work.*

**Wiley** Yeah, that’s right.

**DeLano** *Mrs. Wiley, did the Dust Bowl affect your family’s farm?*

**Wiley** The what?

**DeLano** *The Dust Bowl. Did it affect any of your family’s farms?*

**Wiley** No.

**Finchum** *Well, with all of that work, what would you do for fun?*

**Wiley** Oh, we had tons of fun. (Laughs) We’d rest on Sunday and go visit and play ball. We’d go to ball games and stuff like that, on Sunday.

**Finchum** *On Sunday.*

**Wiley** After Sunday school, after church. (Laughter)

**Finchum** *Now, what kind of ball? Softball, baseball?*

**Wiley** Softball.

**Finchum** *Softball. The boys and the girls get to play together?*

**Wiley** No, we played together in school, ball together. But on Sunday, the boys would go to different places, high land or something, and we’d go up there and play.

**Finchum** *Well, at what point did you come to Stillwater?*

**Wiley** Well, we lived seventeen miles east of Broken Arrow on [Highway] 71. We stayed down there until we got almost grown and some got married down there. Then after we got married, I came to Tulsa and stayed a while, about two years, and then we went down to Oklahoma City, and I left Oklahoma City and came to Stillwater in ’56 I think I came to Stillwater.

**Finchum** *You’ve been here a while, then.*

**Wiley** Mmhmm. Came here and I started working. I started working when I was in Oklahoma City. That’s where I learned how—well I always did know how to cook. I was always the breakfast cook at home. My older sister was the cook at home, and when she left, went to California, I took over. And I cooked every morning. Before I went to school, I cooked their breakfast. Then, walked about a mile to catch the bus.

**Finchum** *Wow. Did you get to leave the dishes for someone else to wash?*

**Wiley** Yeah. (Laughter) Yeah, sometimes my parents wouldn’t be up out of bed before we leave to go to school, because we leave to go to school by seven o’clock. Of course we had to go up about a mile to catch the bus, and then we leave there, we go about, oh it’d take a little while, go out and get somebody else and by the time we get to school it would be nine o’clock, and we’d leave home at seven o’clock. And we go about thirteen miles, I think, to school every morning.

**Finchum** *Were most of the students black? Were they African American, in that school…*

**Wiley** Yeah.

**Finchum** …*there, at that time?*

**Wiley** Uh huh.

**Finchum** *So what would you fix for breakfast?*

**Wiley** Mostly I cooked some bacon and eggs and rice. We never did eat no cereal. (Laughs) We didn’t know what cereal was. We eat mostly bacon and eggs.

**Finchum** *That’s better anyway.*

**Wiley** Bacon and eggs and rice and oatmeal.

**Finchum** *Biscuits?*

**Wiley** Yeah, biscuits. I had to make them every morning.

**Finchum** *Big old iron skillets?*

**Wiley** Uh huh.

**Finchum** *Well, let’s back up. How did you meet your husband?*

**Wiley** Well, we went to school down there in Broken Arrow. Met him down there. But, about two years, we separated, and I came to Oklahoma City, after I got done with that. Me and my first husband separated.

**Finchum** *And you started working at that point, as a cook?*

**Wiley** Yeah, I worked a little bit in Tulsa, when I was married to my first husband. I worked at St. John Hospital there. And then when I went to Oklahoma City, I cooked at O’Mealey’s cafeteria (Classen Cafeteria). When I came to Stillwater, I cooked at Gamma Phi Beta sorority house [for twenty-three years].

**Finchum** *Oh.*

**Wiley** I cooked there about thirty-nine years. But I worked two more sororities before I started working at Gamma Phi Beta. So all total I worked, through all the houses, for about forty-two years, until I retired.

**Finchum** *I can’t imagine what that was like, with all the girls and the drama. (Laughs)*

**Wiley** Yeah, bunch of them.

**Finchum** *Well, did you live there, at the sorority? Would you live there or have to come early enough to cook?*

**Wiley** I’d come there and cook every morning, seven o’clock. I still hear from some of the girls.

**Finchum** *What would they call you?*

**Wiley** They called me Lois.

**Finchum** *Lois.*

**Wiley** Uh huh.

**Finchum** *Miss Lois?*

**Wiley** Just Lois. I had some nice kitchen boys. They were nice too. They all were nice.

**Finchum** *What was the favorite thing you cooked for them?*

**Wiley** Macaroni and cheese. (Laughter) They talk about that now if I see them, about macaroni and cheese.

**Finchum** *From scratch?*

**Wiley** Uh huh.

**Finchum** *Not desserts?*

**Wiley** There’s a dessert I made. I don’t know, we just called it graduation dessert. Always made it special, and so they took that recipe down to Dallas, that recipe.

**Finchum** *That was kind of a fun job to have, in a way.*

**Wiley** Mmhmm, it was. Yeah. You’re going to meet them all the time.

**Finchum** *And would they have to come dressed for breakfast? Or could they come in their pajamas?*

**Wiley** They come dressed. They’d be on their way to school, when they get up. They don’t want to get up early. They just come and eat.

**Finchum** *And then you would do dinner?*

**Wiley** Mmhmm. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

**Finchum** *Oh, you served lunch too?*

**Wiley** Yeah.

**Finchum** *So you had to cook all day.*

**Wiley** Yeah. On Monday nights, they’re all coming, the pledges and all, about 150 girls there on Monday night.

**Finchum** *Wow. I hope you had help.*

**Wiley** Yeah, I had help on Monday night.

**Finchum** *Was it hard to get that job?*

**Wiley** No.

**Finchum** *No? Is that the reason you came to Stillwater?*

**Wiley** No.

**Finchum** *No? Well, what brought you to Stillwater?*

**Wiley** I got married again, and my husband was working in Stillwater. He was already here.

**Finchum** *So, this is your second husband.*

**Wiley** Uh huh.

**Finchum** *Okay. And what was he doing in Stillwater?*

**Wiley** He was working too. He was a cook, also.

**Finchum** *Cook, okay! So, who cooked at home?*

**Wiley** We both cooked at home. (Laughter)

**DeLano** *What were your impressions when you first got to Stillwater? What did you think of Stillwater?*

**Wiley** It wasn’t much. The one think I liked about it, I could walk to work. (Laughs) In Oklahoma City, I had to catch a bus, then catch a bus again to go out on Twenty-third. Had to catch a bus twice just to get to work. But here, I just get out and go right up the street. I didn’t live far from it.

**Finchum** *Do you remember what street you lived on when you first came?*

**Wiley** Came here? On Jefferson Street.

**Finchum** *Jefferson, okay.*

**Wiley** Twelfth and Jefferson.

**Finchum** *Is the house still standing?*

**Wiley** No, they tore it down about, not too long ago.

**Finchum** *So, in 1956 is when you came here?*

**Wiley** Mmhmm.

**Finchum** *That was about the time they were integrating the schools.*

**Wiley** Yeah.

**Finchum** *Do you remember much about that conversation?*

**Wiley** Not too much, but I remember down on Washington Street—I had two kids by my first husband, and they was going to school at Washington. And, I had two more, so four altogether. And they went to Washington School. They started at Dunbar School down here.

**Finchum** *It’s actually Booker T. Washington, isn’t it? But they call it Washington?*

**Wiley** They call it Booker T. Washington down here, I think.

**Finchum** *Okay, call it both. Well, do you remember going into that school, Washington School, as a parent?*

**Wiley** Yeah, I went down there when they’d have school plays and something like that.

**Finchum** *Well, did they have a pretty good sports team?*

**Wiley** Yeah, it was pretty good. Had a good football team.

**Finchum** *So, which children went there?*

**Wiley** All my four last ones, they went down there. Well, my last two, they didn’t go down there.

**Finchum** *They switched by then?*

**Wiley** But two of them went down there.

**Finchum** *Where did your husband work as a cook?*

**Wiley** He worked at Taylor’s Café and at a pizza place. Thurmond, I think it named Thurmond Pizza, until he passed away.

**Finchum** *Where was that?*

**Wiley** Here in Stillwater. He worked at Smith’s Café, too, down on Main Street. I think by the Stillwater Bank on Main Street.

**Finchum** *Okay.*

**Wiley** And Dewey Luper’s, he worked up there.

**Finchum** *What was his specialty when he cooked?*

**Wiley** Oh, (laughs) I don’t know.

**Finchum** *Did he do chicken-fried steak?*

**Wiley** Yeah, yeah, I think so.

**Finchum** *Well, in the ’50s, were things pretty separated between the blacks and the whites still, at that point in Stillwater?*

**Wiley** Yeah, I think so. Yeah.

**Finchum** *Separate drinking fountains, do you remember any of that?*

**Wiley** I don’t know, I didn’t go around that much. I guess there was, but...

**Finchum** *Too busy taking care of those sorority girls.*

**Wiley** Yeah. (Laughter) They kept me busy. I didn’t see much of that, you know.

**Finchum** *Would you go to the theater?*

**Wiley** No, I never did go to no show.

**Finchum** *Okay. And then, where would you go to church?*

**Wiley** I went down at Lawson Temple Church of God in Christ.

**Finchum** *When you first moved?*

**Wiley** Mmhmm.

**Finchum** *It’s close to the ballparks now. Is that where it’s always been?*

**Wiley** Yeah, uh huh. Right across the street from the park.

**Finchum** *Okay. And then, Mount Zion is up on Ninth. Has it always been there, too?*

**Wiley** No. It was down at Eleventh Street, on the corner of Knoblock.

**Finchum** *Knoblock and Eleventh.*

**Wiley** Yeah.

**Finchum** *And they moved it. Do you know why?*

**Wiley** I guess they wanted a bigger place or something. I don’t know.

**Finchum** *Well, is the first one still there?*

**Wiley** No, it’s not there.

**Finchum** *They tore it down?*

**Wiley** Yeah.

**Finchum** *Well, where you lived, did you have any flooding?*

**Wiley** Yeah. It flooded in ’56, ’56 and ’59. It flooded ’56 and ’59, cause we had to move out. And that’s one reason we moved. Moved [to] Eleventh, from Jefferson and Twelfth to Eleventh and, (laughs) I can’t think of the street! Eleventh and [West], right there across, right on the corner, down from that school up there, the library.

**DeLano** *Duck?*

**Wiley** Yeah, Eleventh and Duck. I moved up there.

**Finchum** *Okay, kind of got a pretty good idea of where that is, yeah. That puts you a little bit further from the University. You had to walk a little further.*

**Wiley** Yeah, a little further, but by that time, I was driving. I had a car, got me a car, and I was driving that.

**Finchum** *Who taught you how to drive?*

**Wiley** My son-in-law. (Laughter)

**Finchum** *Was it pretty hard, to learn?*

**Wiley** No, it wasn’t hard.

**Finchum** *Stick shift?*

**Wiley** No, it wasn’t stick shift.

**Finchum** *Got an automatic. Hey, me too. (Laughter) So, where do you go to church nowadays?*

**Wiley** I still go to Lawson Temple.

**Finchum** *Lawson Temple, okay.* *And has the community changed much from when you first moved here?*

**Wiley** Yeah, it’s changed quite a bit.

**Finchum** *Doesn’t seem to be as many families in one spot anymore.*

**Wiley** No, they’re all over town now. Blacks were all together down there, around the school there.

**DeLano** *Why do you think that the families got dispersed?*

**Wiley** What do you mean?

**DeLano** *Why do you think that the families all lived in one area, then all moved away?*

**Wiley** I guess that’s what they did when they first came here, I think. They were already like that when I came here. But the people, it started flooding, they started moving out. I mean, that’s why we moved out.

**DeLano** *So a lot of people, after the floods, moved away from that area by the, now present, library.*

**Wiley** Uh huh.

**Finchum** *The urban renewal wasn’t until a little bit later.*

**Wiley** Yeah. Urban renewal moved a whole lot of them.

**Finchum** *Well, when did you move in this house, where we are now?*

**Wiley** I moved here in, I think ’79, ’78, ’78 or ’79.

**Finchum** *Well, we’re pretty high here. There shouldn’t be any flooding.*

**Wiley** Yeah. (Laughter)

**Finchum** *Or we seem to be pretty high.*

**Wiley** It’s high. I think it’s the highest place up here.

**Finchum** *(Laughs) Is that why you picked it?*

**Wiley** (Laughs) Yeah.

**Finchum** *So, you retired when you were how old?*

**Wiley** I retired in ’97 from the sorority. And then I came in and worked down here, this restaurant, this nursing home. I worked down there about two years, and then I retired.

**Finchum** *So you were in your seventies when you decided to kick your heels up a little bit. Well, what would you do for fun as an adult? When you weren’t working, what would you do? Play cards, or go dancing, or…?*

**Wiley** No, go out. I’d usually go out of town a lot of times, to different churches. I went to a—we have a group of women, the Church of God in Christ ladies. We have a big meeting every year in May, and I go to that meeting every year, to different states. I have been to about every state in the United States. I think I’ve been to forty-five. Different years I go to different places, Texas, Arkansas, all down and out west, and in between. (Laughs)

**Finchum** *Do you have a favorite spot?*

**Wiley** Well, we went to Atlanta a lot and Texas. Went to New York, and New Jersey and all that. All them places I’ve been, Denver. I think in Arizona, Wyoming, all them states. Utah.

**Finchum** *Well, back when you were fixing breakfast for your brothers and sisters, you probably never thought you’d get to some of those places.*

**Wiley** Yeah, that’s right, but I always go. I still went when I was working at the sorority house. See, the convention, the women’s convention don’t start until about the middle of May, and school be out then and I can go.

**Finchum** *Would it be a weeklong thing?*

**Wiley** Uh huh, it’d be a week.

**Finchum** *And just women?*

**Wiley** Uh huh. It’d be quite a few men too, bishops and things like that.

**Finchum** *Well, were you in the choir, or teach Sunday school or…?*

**Wiley** I was in choir and I taught Bible there, and I was a prison and widow worker. I was a district worker, would go to districts, and the states. I worked in the state, and the district, and our local.

**Finchum** *Did a little bit of it all, huh?*

**Wiley** (Laughs) Where I go to them meetings now, I worked there, too. Hospitality.

**Finchum** *Is Stillwater one of the smallest places represented?*

**Wiley** Yeah.

**Finchum** *Is it?*

**Wiley** Mmhmm.

**Finchum** *So, where do you consider home?*

**Wiley** I say Okmulgee.

**Finchum** *Okmulgee? And you were there from the time you were born until you married?*

**Wiley** We left Okmulgee County…

**Finchum** *Went to Wagoner.*

**Wiley** …and went to Muskogee County. And then went to Wagoner County. Then I lived in Tulsa County, and went to Oklahoma County, and came to Payne County.

**Finchum** *You’ve been to several.*

**Wiley** Yeah, I did. I went to thirteen different, about seven different schools all my life.

**Finchum** *Hard to keep up with friends when you had to move, isn’t it?*

**Wiley** Yeah.

**Finchum** *Well, where did your parents finally settle and stay?*

**Wiley** Okmulgee.

**Finchum** *Okmulgee?*

**Wiley** Uh huh. They retired there in—by ’56, they retired and moved back to Okmulgee.

**Finchum** *That’s where they’re buried? Are they buried there?*

**Wiley** Uh huh.

**Finchum** *So, Stillwater, you’ve lived here longer than anywhere else?*

**Wiley** Yeah.

**DeLano** *Do you remember, like, some of the prominent black families that were active in the African American community when you came to Stillwater?*

**Wiley** Yeah. I know—I think Herman Murray, he worked in the African American project.

**DeLano** *So Mr. Murray was a leader in the neighborhood?*

**Wiley** Yeah, he was doing stuff and worked. I never did work with that black stuff like that.

**Finchum** *Well, was the minister of your church pretty, was he in charge of the community?*

**Wiley** Yeah, he was a, Lawson.

**Finchum** *Lawson.*

**Wiley** Yeah.

**Finchum** *Okay.*

**Wiley** He didn’t participate in much of that.

**DeLano** *And so, when did Church of God in Christ become known as Lawson Temple?*

**Wiley** It was, that church been there about ninety-something years, but his dad was the pastor. And after his dad passed, [Reverend Fred D. Lawson, Jr.], he took it. And when he passed, I think they put Lawson Temple.

**DeLano** *In memory of him?*

**Wiley** Mmhmm.

**DeLano** *And so, did his father, Mr. Lawson, start the church?*

**Wiley** Uh huh, in, yeah, in 1924.

**DeLano** *So, Church of God in Christ started in 1924 with Mr. Lawson, Sr.*

**Wiley** Senior, Senior Lawson, uh huh. And Junior took it over in ’56, I think.

**DeLano** *And so, who was the pastor after the second Mr. Lawson?*

**Wiley** Johnson, the one that’s there now.

**DeLano** *So, he’s been there quite a while, then, as pastor.*

**Wiley** Yeah, Johnson. He’s been there about ten years. About twelve years.

**DeLano** *Oh! So, the younger Mr. Lawson was there for quite a while?*

**Wiley** Yeah.

**DeLano** *Do you remember what his first name was?*

**Wiley** Fred, junior. Fred Douglas, Jr.

**DeLano** *And were there a lot of businesses in the neighborhood where you lived there, that were owned by African American families?*

**Wiley** Mmm, I think one or two. I think one or two. Mr. Thomas he had a café when I came here.

**DeLano** *Mrs. Bailey’s [Gloria Thomas-Bailey] father?*

**Wiley** Yeah, I think.

**DeLano** *So he had a café, and there were a few other businesses owned by black families?*

**Wiley** I think Murray had, I think he had a business, too, at one time. I think that’s about all.

**DeLano** *So, where would you do things like get your groceries?*

**Wiley** There was a grocery store here on Tenth and Main. That’s where I got mine at. [And there was Mr. Johnson’s grocery store on Twelfth and Hester.]

**DeLano** *And so sometimes you would visit the stores on Main Street?*

**Wiley** Uh huh, and this is W & W [Food Mart], down here on Seventh and Duck.

**DeLano** *Kind of where Strode’s [Funeral Home] is?*

**Wiley** Yeah.

**DeLano** *The Annex, and did you feel welcome there?*

**Wiley** Mmhmm.

**DeLano** *And were there any times where you didn’t feel welcome where people who were white were, here in Stillwater?*

**Wiley** I don’t recall.

**DeLano** *I know Mrs. Bailey says that she didn’t recall, really, there being very much in the way of racial tensions. Is that your thought, or do you recall any instances?*

**Wiley** Yeah. I don’t either.

**Finchum** *Where would you go to the bank?*

**Wiley** I went up to the First National Bank, up here on, wherever it is now, that bank, has that drive-in bank right behind.

**Finchum** *I know where you’re talking about, but I don’t know what it’s called now.*

**Wiley** Yeah, it’s still the bank that I had when I first came here. Still got it.

**DeLano** *Wow, loyal customer. (Laughter) Well, how about your kids? When they were young, your first years in Stillwater, what sort of things would they do for fun or recreation?*

**Wiley** They played ball. I have one son, he was in everything. He was in wrestling, football, baseball, and one run track. They all kept busy.

**DeLano** *And so, you said then that you had kids who did go to Washington when it was segregated?*

**Wiley** Mmhmm.

**DeLano** *Then they made the jump over to the integrated schools?*

**Wiley** Mmhmm.

**DeLano** *Do you remember what it was like for them, when they made that change?*

**Wiley** No, I didn’t see no difference.

**DeLano** *So not, they weren’t nervous or…*

**Wiley** Mm-mm.

**DeLano** *…or scared or anything?*

**Finchum** *How many boys and girls, you had six total?*

**Wiley** Yeah. One girl and five boys.

**Finchum** *Oh, okay. That’s why sports were so, you were so busy with that.*

**DeLano** *And so, they ended up graduating or going to school and graduating here in Stillwater?*

**Wiley** Mmhmm.

**DeLano** *And did any of the kids stay here in Stillwater?*

**Wiley** Well, one of them, two of them still here.

**Finchum** *They would consider Stillwater home?*

**Wiley** Mmhmm.

**DeLano** *Mrs. Bailey had mentioned something about another park that was in that area in the neighborhood where you lived, that isn’t there now. Do you recall that park that was maybe on Fourteenth Street?*

**Wiley** Fourteenth Street? Yeah, there’s one down there. Fourteenth? There’s a park across the street from the church, the Church of God in Christ. One down here on Twelfth Street, I think. I ain’t never been to that. I’ve been to one here across the street from the church. Oh yeah, and they had another good—Mrs. Johnson, they had a grocery store, too, here.

**DeLano** *And Mrs. Johnson, the Johnsons, they were an African American family?*

**Wiley** Yeah, uh huh.

**DeLano** *And so they had a grocery store, and do you remember where it was located?*

**Wiley** It was on Hester, Twelfth and Hester.

**DeLano** *And so did you say Mrs. Johnson was the one who owned it?*

**Wiley** Mmhmm.

**DeLano** *So a woman owned the business?*

**Wiley** Well, she had a husband who was with her then.

**DeLano** *Gotcha.*

**Wiley** Yeah.

**DeLano** *And so, what were the lives like for women then? Did you feel like you had a lot of freedom to do things that you wanted to do, or did you feel like you were kind of tied to your house, and to taking care of the family?*

**Wiley** I think they did what they wanted to. (Laughs) I was busy working three meals. I didn’t, I just went to church and back to work.

**Finchum** *Well, when your children needed disciplined, who would do that? You or your husband?*

**Wiley** Both of us. My husband worked at night mostly, and I worked at day.

**Finchum** *Well, would they go to, I think it was the Crystal Plunge, the swimming pool?*

**Wiley** Yeah.

**Finchum** *Would they get to do that?*

**Wiley** Mmhmm. Yeah, they went there, to the swimming pool. Went to play ball and different things.

**DeLano** *Did you ever get to meet or talk very much with the principal of Washington, Mr. Ward?*

**Wiley** Principal, no, I didn’t.

**DeLano** *That’s probably good. That means you didn’t ever get called in, (laughter) for kids.*

**Finchum** *You remember anything in particular about the neighborhood when you first moved? Were people friendly to you and….*

**Wiley** I’d say no, they weren’t friendly. (Laughs)

**Finchum** *They weren’t? (Laughs)*

**Wiley** Hm-mm.

**Finchum** *Newcomer?*

**Wiley** Yes.

**DeLano** *Did you end up making friends, though?*

**Wiley** Yeah, I made friends out of church people.

**DeLano** *And so, who were the names of some of the families in Lawson Temple, other than the pastor’s family?*

**Wiley** There’s the Thames, the Thames and the Linzys.

**Finchum** *Do you recognize those names?*

**DeLano** *I do recognize Linzy. Mrs. Bailey was able to identify him in some of the nice football pictures, one of the sons, yeah.*

**Finchum** *And the other name was Thame?*

**Wiley** Uh huh. T-H-A-M-E-S.

**Finchum** *Thames.*

**DeLano** *And so, what would a church service look like, on a Sunday?*

**Wiley** It was good. Weren’t many people there, but it was good.

**DeLano** *So it had a small congregation?*

**Wiley** Mmhmm, yeah.

**DeLano** *So you’d start out with, what? Sunday school?*

**Wiley** Mmhmm, Sunday school.

**DeLano** *And then what would happen?*

**Wiley** Then, we have our church service. And then, we come back at night, at evening, about six o’clock, and have Willing Worker.

**DeLano** *Have a what?*

**Wiley** Willing Worker. That’s a class for the young people. I lost a tooth. It lasts about ten o’clock. Then we go different places, Langston, Meridian, and have church every first Saturday of the month. They come here, we go there, one Saturday. Just change around like that.

**DeLano** *And did you have other days where you went to the church?*

**Wiley** Yeah. We had church on Wednesday and Friday night and Sunday, Sunday night.

**DeLano** *And so, I was familiar with those Wednesday services. What would you all do on Friday evenings?*

**Wiley** Oh, we’d have a regular church service. They called that pastoral night.

**DeLano** *And did you have wedding ceremonies there?*

**Wiley** Mmhmm.

**DeLano** *Do you remember any that were back in the ’50s, kind of, what it looked like or what the ceremonies were like?*

**Wiley** No. We had anniversaries, different things like that. There was revivals and stuff. They was good, too. Revivals, anniversaries.

**DeLano** *Would the revivals be inside the church or outside the church?*

**Wiley** Inside.

**DeLano** *And what would happen at a revival?*

**Wiley** Well, people come to the Lord and some other things.

**Finchum** *The minister would be from another church, typically, for a revival?*

**Wiley** Uh huh, yeah.

**Finchum** *Lot of good music?*

**Wiley** Yeah.

**Finchum** *You have a favorite church song? What’s your favorite?*

**Wiley** A whole lot of them. (Laughs) Let’s see, “There’s Something Within Me,” and “Through it All,” and I can’t think of another one.

**Finchum** *Well, that’s okay.*

**Wiley** “Precious Lord,” “Just Another Day.”

**Finchum “***Just Another Day.” Not “Amazing Grace,” huh?*

**Wiley** Yeah, “Amazing Grace.” (Laughter)

**DeLano** *And were baptisms held inside the church?*

**Wiley** No. We went to the Baptist church to be baptized. They had one at their church.

**DeLano** *They had a baptismal?*

**Wiley** Yeah.

**DeLano** *And that’s the First Baptist Church, over by the courthouse?*

**Wiley** Yeah.

**DeLano** *And so they would occasionally let everyone come over for baptisms?*

**Wiley** Mmhmm.

**DeLano** *Well, do you remember voting?*

**Wiley** Yeah.

**DeLano** *Do you happen to remember any of the times when you first voted?*

**Wiley** First time I voted? I think I was—I don’t know whether I was in Oklahoma City or not, or Tulsa. But, I don’t know, (laughs) but I remember voting here, too. I don’t remember the first place or time.

**DeLano** *Were there any people who were in the African American community who were political or politicians? Anyone who was running for offices?*

**Wiley** Yeah, there were….

**Finchum** *Well, do you remember when John F. Kennedy was shot?*

**Wiley** Mmhmm.

**Finchum** *And how that impacted the community?*

**Wiley** Yeah, I was at the sorority house. I was on a break when I first heard it, sitting in my room at the sorority house when I heard that he got shot.

**Finchum** *How did the community respond or react?*

**Wiley** Everybody was sad.

**DeLano** *And do you recall the same with Martin Luther King?*

**Wiley** Yeah, I was at work.

**DeLano** *And what did you think about Mr. King?*

**Wiley** He, I think he was all right.

**DeLano** *And what did you think about Mr. Obama becoming president?*

**Wiley** I think that was nice. I think he was real smart, and he couldn’t do what he wanted to do. Every time he did something, they were against him. I think he has got this peace in him and that’s kept going.

**Finchum** *Probably never thought you would see the day when he was elected.*

**Wiley** Mmhmm.

**DeLano** *Well, we’ve tired you out. (Laughter)*

**Finchum** *Anything we need to ask that we don’t know to ask? Any special memories of Stillwater?*

**Wiley** (Laughs) No.

**Finchum** *Of OSU?*

**Wiley** No.

**Finchum** *Did you get to see any of the girls get thrown in Theta Pond when they got engaged?*

**Wiley** (Laughter) No.

**Finchum** *They did some of that! Well, I guess more to the boys than the girls.*

**Wiley** Yeah, I think so. (Laughter)

**Finchum** *Well, and they had streaking while you were there, too, right?*

**Wiley** Yeah, they had it. (Laughter)

**Finchum** *You’ve seen some changes on campus, too, I’d say.*

**Wiley** Yeah, a whole lot of them. Yeah, I had a sister go up there and a niece. I told them they won’t know the campus now if they go up there. So many things have changed.

**DeLano** *What’s the biggest change that stands out to you?*

**Wiley** The way they all change, different things.

**Finchum** *Well, when you first got here, they were just finishing building the Student Union, I guess.*

**Wiley** Yeah.

**Finchum** *In ’56, ’57, through there.*

**Wiley** I haven’t been back up there. I just pass through there now.

**Finchum** *It looks pretty now. They’ve worked on the landscaping a whole lot.*

**Wiley** Yeah.

**Finchum** *When was the last time you were at the sorority house?*

**Wiley** I haven’t—I was up there once. They haven’t changed it. They have something about coming in, cooking. I don’t know what, but they don’t have no cooks like they used to have.

**Finchum** *No, that’s what I’ve heard, too. Well we’ll finish by asking, how do you want to be remembered?*

**Wiley** Oh, I don’t know. (Laughs)

**Finchum** *As a good cook, a good mother, a good friend?*

**Wiley** Yeah.

**Finchum** *Good Christian?*

**Wiley** Yeah, that’s right. That’s all right.

**Finchum** *All of the above?*

**Wiley** Mmhmm. Yeah. I remember all the girls, I like to sit here and think about it. See that? (Gestures) From a little girl that talks about when she gets old and fat, think about her. I don’t know where—I wonder where she’s at now.

**Finchum** *She’s probably wondering how you’re doing.*

**Wiley** Yeah. She said when she gets old and fat, she’d think about the food and stuff and things she did.

**DeLano** *Are you looking for the letter behind you?*

**Finchum** *The framed piece?*

**Wiley** Yeah, it’s…

**Finchum** *Are you looking for this, here?*

**Wiley** Yes. You can read if you want to.

**Finchum** *“Ode to Lois.”*

**DeLano** *(Gasps) Aw!*

**Finchum** *I’ll read for the recording.*

*Funny how it seems only yesterday, when I was a pledge, coming over to the house for Monday night dinner. And on one of those many Monday nights, I’m not quite sure which, for it’s all rather vague now, I realized that our dinner did not magically appear and disappear. But that busy young men, in white coats, brought in our plates, answered innumerable bells, listened to songs they had probably heard many more times than I, and sometimes, even seemed to be enjoying themselves. This I’ve learned later, is carefully concealed, except for certain times…*

*Remember the trivia-Jeopardy bowl?*

*It was a marathon one;*

*how those buzzers buzzed,*

*we had lots of fun.*

*And the carefully planned sneaks,*

*ah the nostalgia of it all;*

*from pledges to seniors,*

*and even to houseboys I recall.*

*Lois and her quiet ways*

*never had much to say.*

*But she was always there,*

*good as gold,*

*to fill our stomachs*

*with all they could hold.*

*Houseboy entertainment*

*was out of sight;*

*but it was climaxed*

*on Houseboy Awards Banquet night.*

*Yes, the Academy has outdone itself;*

*it’s a fine group of men*

*we call our houseboys*

*and I consider my friends.*

*So from the bottom of my Gama Phi heart,*

*I wish you good luck, and with that, I depart.*

*And someday when you are old and fat,*

*maybe you’ll read this and remember that,*

*somewhere in some far off school,*

*sits a schoolmarm oh so cool;*

*thinking of her college years,*

*wiping away sentimental tears;*

*and in her memories, you’ll remain,*

*I hope in yours she’ll do the same.*

*Love, Eowana*

**Wiley** Eowana.

**Finchum** *Is that how you say that?*

**Wiley** Mmhmm.

**Finchum** *That was a long time ago! May of 1969.*

**Wiley** (Laughs)

**Finchum** *“Lois and her quiet ways.” Were you really quiet?*

**Wiley** I don’t know.

**Finchum** *Didn’t fuss too much, huh?*

**Wiley** (Laughs) No.

**Finchum** *Well that was very nice. I like that. That’s a good way to end, don’t you think?*

**Wiley** Mmhmm.

**Finchum** *Well, we appreciate you talking with us. Anything else you want to add before we flip our off button?*

**Wiley** No.

**Finchum** *No. Been a pretty good life?*

**Wiley** Yeah, I’ve had a pretty good life. Pretty good vacations, I went when I was able, you know. I have a sister who said when she retires, she’s going to travel, too. But when she retired, she was sick, and she couldn’t get to do like I did. I put mine in there while I was young and worked too. I put all mine together, working, and went too.

**Finchum** *Well, you had to go for her.*

**Wiley** Yeah.

**Finchum** *Well, I’m glad. We thank you very much for talking with us.*

**Wiley** Yeah, I’m glad you all came by.

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