

CONSULTANT: Missionary Nancy Ross
AGE: Unknown (she didn't say)
RESIDENCE: Durham, NC
OCCUPATION: Missionary with Irving Ministries
INTERVIEW DATE: July 28, 2016, approx. 3:00 pm
LOCATION: Durham Central Bus Station

Nancy Ross is an African-American woman in her 50s or 60s. She was waiting for a bus when I approached her for an interview.

My name is Missionary Nancy Ross. I work at the homeless shelter, Irving Ministries, with the Chaplain, and I've been there 11 years. I have a birthday coming up. My picture will be in the Herald-Sun on August the 15th. And I've been there at the shelter, working with the Chaplain, 11 years. And we go to funerals, nursing homes, hospitals, and all. I'm writing a book. The name of my book is "Laugh, Don't Cry."

I like the title.

It's humor [?]

I think it will sell better than "Cry, Don't Laugh."

[laughs] Yeah.

So Nancy, let's just jump right in; I don't want to take up too much of your time. So like I said, we're talking about New Year's Eve 1999, and you said you remember. So tell me what you remember about that night.

Well, I was in church, praising God. We were singing and praising the Lord, New Year's Eve.

What church was that?

Union Baptist. Pastor Reverend Hammond is the pastor. And I told him he could have been a comedian, but he ended up working for God, because he's very comical. [laughs]

Did the service, did it go straight up until midnight?

Yes. After; after midnight. Everybody really started praising God after twelve.

Do you remember anything about the sermon in particular?

He was preaching about Psalms 37. "Fret not thyself because of evil doers, for they will wither away like the grass. Trust in the Lord and lean not to your own understanding, but in all thy ways acknowledge Him and He will direct it to pass." That's what he was talking about.

Why do you think he chose that Psalm?

Well, because I guess a lot of people were afraid and fearful and not trusting God. So I think that's why.

How did you feel?

Well, I felt like that what's we needed, to trust God. He said, "In all thy ways, acknowledge Him and He will direct our pass." So we have to trust Him, and not man. Man will deceive you, but God won't. Um hum.

Were you fearful? And you can be honest with me, were you fearful at the time that it could have been...something could have happened?

No, because I asked God to keep me covered with his blood; the blood of Jesus. It works. You don't need a gun or a knife or a weapon, because you plead the blood of Jesus, it works. Ask him to keep you covered with his blood. [laughs] That's what you fight with. [laughs]

Are you still with that same church?

Yeah. I've been there since I was a kid. My grandmother used to sing on the radio every Sunday morning with the Amity Cublee [?] Singers. We lived down the street from there, and she used to say, "When I come from the radio station, you better be ready to go to Union."

Nancy continues to talk about her grandmother working for American Tobacco, her family's history at Union Baptist Church, how she used to own a jewelry store in Boston, how she got tired of the cold weather and returned to Durham. It's fascinating and worth archiving at the Southern Folklife Center, but the transcription is beyond the scope of the Millennium Project.

So, you've already touched on this a little bit, but how do you think things have changed since then, until now?

Well, there's a lot of crime now. A lot of people stealing; some killing. But we can't focus, can't focus on that. We have to keep our mind on Jesus. Because he said if we keep our mind on him, he gonna keep us in perfect peace, whose mind stays on him. But it's a lot happening now. But we can't focus on that. You gotta keep focused on God. He said, "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he will direct our pass, not man."

I can't believe that you remember the Psalm that the preacher was preaching that now.

Nancy laughs.

Now, is that ordinary, that you remember specific –

Normally I always normally do. I really do.

Wow. Do you remember any songs that they sang that night?

We sung a song about "Only trust him." "I'm gonna lay down my burden, down by the riverside." All kind of songs we sung. Different ones, in the audience, we sing. And at my job, at the shelter, I normally sing, "Let Jesus fix it for you/he knows just what to do/Whenever you pray, let him have your way/Let him fix it for you." I used to sing that. And I used to sing, "Lead me, guide me, Lord if you lead me, I will not fail."

How have things changed at the homeless shelter in the time that you've been there?

Well, the people at the shelter, they will come and hang from the library to the shelter all day long. So what they did, they stopped giving them 12:00 lunch. They eat breakfast, they get a bag. So that's for their lunch, so they won't have to hang around the shelter all day. They could go look for jobs, or even housing.

I see that you're holding a cell phone. Do you remember getting a first cell phone? Since we're talking about that time period.

Cell phone? It's been so long, my first cell phone, I don't remember getting [laughs] to tell you the truth, no.

How about sending a first email, that sort of thing?

No, I don't do email.

Still to this day?

No, but I was listening –

That's just like my grandmother.

I was listening to my nephew, he's from Boston....

Nancy discusses her nephew's music career and hit song, "Uber." We continue to talk about Nancy's work with the ministry. She mentions some of the horrible things that her clients have experienced (e.g., drug overdoses, one man who decapitated his father, another who died from a spider bite). Nancy's father is from Hillsborough, NC. Her mother caught him with another woman, and he tried to commit suicide by jumping out of a tree. Nancy's mother climbed the tree and got him down. Nancy remembered wanting to get ballerina shoes as a child, but her grandmother wouldn't let her. Nancy recalled raising foster children in Boston, one of whom had been raped. Again, it's very interesting and worth archiving, but beyond the scope of the project.