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AGE: 42
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My name is Michelle McKee, I'm 42, and I live in Hillsborough. I grew up in Hickory, NC.

You already heard a little bit about the project, and I didn't want to preface it too much so you had something prepared in your mind before we started talking. I'm interested in getting people's thoughts from that time period. What do you personally remember about that day – that New Year's Eve 1999, going into 2000?

That's interesting. So the first thing that comes into my mind, and since it's been years now, it's fuzzy, but the memory that comes to my mind, is my grandmother came over, because she was fearful about the turn of the century, and all of the hype that was going on with Y2K and all of this stuff that the media was speaking of. So I remember her coming over and actually staying that night. I didn't go out, we didn't have a New Year's party, we simply just stayed in the house, as a family, did our normal routine that night. And the only thing that was unusual was my grandmother stayed and talked a lot about what the future held, and was fearful about the turn of the century.

Why was she afraid?

Well, she was caught up in some of the media sensation. And she, not being a tech-savvy person, she didn't quite understand computers, and didn't embrace technology, she thought that this was gonna cause like a major glitch in like the banking issues, and she may lose all of her money, and the world may implode [sing-song, yadda yadda tone]. It was all very sensationalized in her mind. Now, you have to keep in mind, this was a lady that had an eighth grade education; she grew up in rural North Carolina, so there wasn't formal education there, and I think she fed off some of the sensationalism of the media.

And did you try to quell her fears? Or did you share on some level some of her concerns?

I certainly shared trepidation because the media talked about it a lot. I didn't lose sleep. She lost sleep over it. I didn't lose sleep over it. She was truly fearful. I wondered what would unfold. I thought there was probably a lot of embellishing of what could happen. But yeah, it was on my mind. I think like many Americans.

Did you expect *something* to happen?

I did, yes. I did. Now what was that something, I couldn't say. I expected something unforeseen to happen as related to computers. And it would affect our daily life in some way.

Do you remember how you felt the next morning when you woke up and –

Relieved. Sure, relieved. And you know, this is the, it was mostly relief. My grandmother was relief on an exponential scale, But it was just like, well, 'Oh.' You know, nothing major happened. We're all here. Let's go forward. That kind of sigh of relief.

Did your grandmother take any steps besides coming to stay with you that night to prepare?

To prepare for the turn of the century? That's a good question. I have to think about that. I do remember her saying that she had kind of squirreled away as she called it, extra money. She was all cash in hand. She wasn't a credit card kind of person.

This was the case before the Y2K bug?

Yeah. Absolutely. But I do remember her saying "I better have a little extra on hand." That's funny, I haven't thought about that. I hadn't thought about that in a long time.

So take me back to the clock ticking down. Do you remember midnight approaching?

No. I was actually asleep. So you can see I didn't lose sleep over this. I have a feeling she was awake. We shared a room. I was in a very small house, and we shared a room. She had the bed and I had an airbed on the floor. And I feel sure she was awake. I slept through it. I wasn't out partying. I wasn't interested in any of that at that particular time.

So you were asleep but your grandmother –

Exactly. Yeah.

What do you remember about that night before you fell asleep?

Two days before the turn of the century? Or the night –

Either. The buildup to the transition.

I don't remember anything specifically there. I don't.

And then as far as, beyond what you personally remember. We've already talked about Y2K. What else, when you think about 1999, that time period becoming the 2000s, what's the first that jumps in your mind?

[laughs] Prince's song. You know, of course, with his passing, that's probably fresh on my mind anyway. Also, the other cultures in antiquity who had feared the turn of big, centuries. And how things like the Mayan calendar. Just how these things get built up and it always seems to work out.

Were you aware that it wasn't actually the turn of the millennium?

I was. Right, yeah. I was.

A lot of people –

My grandmother was not.

And it seemed like it was pedantic to point that out to people.

I don't think she would have grasped it. I mean, again, you have to understand the person that was there, you know. It wasn't a conversation that was needed. Yeah.

Interesting. So it was you and your grandmother, and you were in you said, Hickory, at the time?

Hickory

Wow.

Which is in the foothills of NC.

I mention that my former sister-in-law is from Hickory.

Do you remember what some other people in town were doing on that New Years?

Since I was in the house, and not out, I couldn't say for sure, except that there were parties, and you could hear fireworks. And you could hear, commotion, in the neighborhood. But that's not particularly different from other New Year's Eves. I know that there were several bars downtown that had special events, and had the Y2K glasses, I remember that. They were green. I remember they were green, I think. Yeah, I think they had green, lime green glasses. But I just heard about all of that. I wasn't a part of it first hand.

And another theme that seems to have emerged in talking to people with this, is how much, how exponentially fast the technology has changed since then. Do you remember some of your first encounters with email?

[laughs] Yeah. I do. I didn't have an email account until I went to Carolina. I was in pharmacy school.

What time period was that?

So, let's see, I graduated high school in 92, I went to Carolina in 94, so it would have probably been 94, 95, when I actually...because, you know, they set us all up with an account and prior to that, I didn't have one. I knew about email, but I didn't see a need for it. I was still very much a talk on the phone kind of person. So I can remember distinctly going to the computer lab at Carolina, in the pharmacy school there -- and they had small computer lab. Small. But it was a big deal for us to go there, get your account, and you would email the person sitting across from you. And it was the coolest thing, right? I was probably a little bit of a late adopter, because, I'm not anti social media and all of that, I just think it's a huge time drain if you're not careful. And I had some thoughts early on about email, like, "Why do I need this when I could talk with you? You're right there." So I might not have been an early adopter.

Funny how that's changed, right?

Sure. I still don't tweet. And I don't do Instagram. I do Facebook, but I think 40 year olds are probably the ones doing that. I hear it's not cool for the younger ones, so I don't know. [laughs]

Do you remember getting a cell phone?

I do. It was [laughs]. It was a mounted cell phone, it was in my car. It was not the kind, obviously, that you walked around with. It was mounted. And I had it in my car and my mom gave it, because I was working some late shifts and things like that. And it was for emergencies and it made her feel better that it was in my car. I remember having only certain set of minutes. It wasn't very generous. I used it very sparingly. And it was this *big thing* that sat in the middle, between the passenger seat and the driver's seat. I also remember, just as an aside, getting this humungous bill for minutes I didn't use, and come to find out, I was like zapped. There were these things, I don't know what the terminology is, but somehow, my number was stolen. And the way the police explained it, I must have been talking on the phone at the time, someone saw me and was able to retrieve my number. I had this outrageous bill that I never accumulated those actual minutes. But this was this big clunky thing. I do remember it very well.

Do you remember an experience with new technology that's come along since then, or in the 90s or since then, that's just like a "wow" moment? Like, "This is totally new?"

Facebook was a "wow" moment for me. Yeah, it was. My girlfriend from high school -- who I had not seen since graduation; we were not in touch with each other -- sent me an email inviting me to join Facebook and be friends. I thought, "You know, we're friends, we're friendly; we haven't seen each other but we're friends, my idea of friends." I thought, "Well, she's a neat, neat person. I really liked Robin. I'm gonna see what this thing is." So I joined, and then [*makes the sound of an explosion*], flooded with -- you know, once you're on, you're flooded with friend requests. That was pretty amazing to me, to kind of walk back to high school and revisit all those people.

Do you think the experience of that transition, 1999 to 2000 New Year's and the new millennium and all that, would have been different if you'd had Facebook to connect with people in that way back then?

As far as alleviating the fear? Or any aspect of it?

Yes, as far --

Sure. Sure. I think probably, yeah. We would have been all more connected and probably less fearful. I don't know though.

You think more connected?

If we were all on Facebook? I think so. Don't you feel more connected now than you were in '99? Toward your environment?

Oh, certainly, I do. I think it's breadth and not depth, as much.

Sure. We're not talking about deep, deep conversations, you know? Yeah, no. But I don't think that was the question, right? I think there's that superficial connectivity, yeah. But I don't know which way it would have gone, but perhaps I could envision the other way, where if we were more connected, even superficially, there may have been more fear upon us. Because there would have been more social outlets to have discussions, and everybody has their two cents to you know, place on Facebook about an idea.

People would have thought Facebook was going to explode or something.

Yeah. I guess you're right. I mean, again, I didn't lose sleep over it. It was on my mind as it was every other person that I knew. My grandmother was a different

level, and I've often wondered how other elderly people felt at that time. I only knew my grandmother's perspective.

That's why I'm here, actually.

Yeah.

Michelle recommends that I talk to James Emery, a farmer selling produce next to us at the entrance to the Senior Center. I interviewed Mr. Emery shortly afterward.

Just to tie this up. Is New Year's a holiday that you ordinarily celebrate?

I'm pretty boring. I have a four year old, so I don't like to go out for New Years' Eve. Because sleep is more precious [laughs]. So generally, no, it's not a holiday that I do something major, late, you know. I have been to several concerts, like the Avett Brothers put on a great concert.

I'm familiar with the Avett Brothers' live album from their New Year's Eve concert in Greensboro. We discuss the band for a minute.

So that's an exception, versus my every year.

Good exception.

I thank Michelle for her time and end the interview.