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**Oral History of Houston Project**  
***African American History; St. Nicholas Catholic Church***

Interviewee: Lucy Jackson

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Place: Her home in Stafford, Texas

Interviewer: Natalie Garza

Transcriber: Carol L. Valdes

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**Abstract:**

Lucy Jackson begins with her early education at St. Nicholas School, her family's background information, and her parent's decision to send her to Catholic school. Walking every day to mass and then school, she describes the curriculum, extracurricular activities and teachers, a mixtures of laypeople and clergy. Lucy compares the use of punishment then to present-day, saying that whippings were common by parents, teachers, and neighbors. After attending Texas Southern University, Lucy Jackson went back to St. Nicholas to teach third grade for a small payment, and recalls the hardships of being a single mother. Lucy names various organizations of the Catholic Church and the charitable works they participate in around their community. Ms. Jackson ends with a

**Interviewee: Lucy Jackson**

**Interview: July 26, 2010**

few thoughts on the current state of St. Nicholas Church, the decline of parishioners, and the importance of preserving the church.

NG: This is Natalie Garza. I'm interviewing Ms. Lucy Jackson on June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2010 at her home in Stafford, Texas. Okay, can you please tell me you full name?

LJ: Lucy Catherine McCleroy Jackson.

NG: McCleroy is your maiden...

LJ: Maiden name.

NG: And when were you born?

LJ: September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1928.

NG: Where were you born?

LJ: Here in Houston, Texas.

NG: And did you go to school?

LJ: Yes, I went to, when I finished from St. Nicholas I went off to college, Tuskegee, Alabama and I went there for three and a half years and my mother got real sick and I had to drop out and I stayed out for a year and then I went to TSU and finished up.

NG: So did you get your whole primary education, was it at St. Nicholas?

LJ: Everything was at St. Nicholas, yes.

NG: And were you baptized Catholic? Were your parents already Catholic?

LJ: I was baptized when I was six weeks old at St. Nicholas. I made my first communion there, confirmation, and married there.

NG: So all of the major events at St. Nicholas?

LJ: Right, was at St. Nicholas.

NG: What is your parent's background, are they...? Because I, from what I've noticed

**Interviewee: Lucy Jackson****Interview: July 26, 2010**

is that a lot of people that are Catholic, a lot of black people who are Catholic are Creole background?

LJ: Yes...

NG: From Louisiana.

LJ: My mother was born in St. Martinsville, Louisiana and my father was from Louisville, Kentucky. They met here in Houston and my mother was Catholic, she went to St. Nicholas, was there every morning. Mass was at 6:30, and she was there every morning that they had mass and my father, he was Baptist. He belonged to Antioch Baptist Church and when we started getting older he became Catholic and when I say he was a good Catholic, he was a good Catholic. He worked around the church. The grotto that they have at St. Nicholas he helped build that.

NG: And what are your parent's names or what were their names?

LJ: What, what...

NG: Your parent's names?

LJ: My mother name was Filamena Woodley and my father name was Hugh McCleroy.

NG: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

LJ: I had two brothers, three brothers, and one sister and all are deceased, but one brother and he lives in Beaumont, Texas and he's the baby of the family. I was one of the oldest and he is the youngest.

NG: Why did your parents decide to send you to St. Nicholas School?

LJ: They, my mother was a devout Catholic and this is all we knew, well, the students that was living on the public school side like Jack Yates they went to Catholic school, I

**Interviewee: Lucy Jackson****Interview: July 26, 2010**

don't, you know we used to have to cross each other because the ones that was living by St. Nicholas was going to the public school, but I don't know this is just something that they did.

NG: And where were you living growing up?

LJ: In Third Ward right on Live Oak Street in the 25<sup>th</sup> hundred block on Live Oak and this was before they built the freeways and everything. We could just walk straight out Live Oak and be right there at the church and school.

NG: So you walked to school?

LJ: Walked to school every morning. Rain, sleet, or shine and bus fare was only four cents, but this is what we did, had our books wrapped up in newspaper and everything and we went to mass every morning at St. Nicholas and the mass was at eight o' clock and all the students that went to St. Nicholas attended mass at eight o' clock.

NG: How many students do you think there were at that time at St. Nicholas?

LJ: Oh, I would say it wasn't a, it may have been maybe seventy-five when we first started off because, see St. Nicholas started, school started in 1931 and at that time they only had four graduates of the year that you know, that they went, they had four graduates...

NG: Do you mean graduates from high school?

LJ: From high school mhmm and then, well, St. Nicholas grew as a... the school grew as the children came in. Okay, when we first started off in 1931 it was under the Josephite priests and the sisters of the Holy Family and the school, in my opinion, was a great school. We participated in a lot of activities and we were in competitions with other schools although we were Catholic schools and every time they would ask us to

**Interviewee: Lucy Jackson****Interview: July 26, 2010**

participate in something we were always there. At the parades that they had downtown for different, you know, occasions? Well, they would ask St. Nicholas to participate, we were there. We would march up and down you know Main Street although we didn't have a band, but we would march, all of the people the school ahead of us, music and this is what we did, but we were always there to participate.

NG: What other types of activities did the students get involved in?

LJ: Well, we had a basketball team. The girls and guys had a basketball team and we did good, we really did good. We played schools like Mother of Mercy, different Catholic schools, you know, and we did real good. We did real good and St. Nicholas' graduates were, they are really outstanding now because we have, I would say about three that became nuns, that I, could be more but three that I know of, and one priest and we had my brother George McCleroy, he was the first black journalist and he finished from St. Nicholas. The first black meteorologists finished from St. Nicholas. We had doctors that finished there, two lawyers that I know of finished from there. We had school teachers. At St. Nicholas they had about six lay teachers. To name a few was, Mary Ann Lymens, she went to St. Nicholas and finished from St. Nicholas, Anita Robley, Mary Broussard, Natalie Brown and myself. We taught there and during that time, really, the money that we were getting paid for doing this it was nothing. We were doing it to help the other children, you know, to succeed and our parents used to cook in the cafeteria and they would devote their time. They didn't get paid at all for their, this is just a volunteer thing that they did and the school, we did real good in the classrooms. We had no problems with the children. When Father Hanks was, I think it was when Father Hanks was there we progressed so and the children started coming and that's when we bought

**Interviewee: Lucy Jackson****Interview: July 26, 2010**

the corner lot on Leeland and St. Charles, and this is where we had all our activities like bazaars, Mayfairs and things like that which is now the parking lot where we park when people to church and go to the hall right there on the corner. The sisters that were there they lived where the, I think the pantry, where the pantry is now, this is where they lived and we had, every year, they would go to New Orleans for retreat and everything and they would come back, you know, and they would change, changed the nuns up every so often and we just got a good foundation from St. Nicholas.

NG: The pantry that you were saying, that's the pantry now, is it the same building where the nuns?

LJ: It's the same building where the nuns used to live.

NG: And what happened to the building, the school building?

LJ: The school building, to be honest with you, one Sunday we went to church and it was up and then the next Sunday when we went it was gone and I never got a really good understanding of why that it, you know, that they did this. Because I thought it was unfair because if I would have known it I would have went and got a couple of bricks or something, you know, just to save for a souvenir from the school that I finished from because I finished there in '45, and when I finished it was seventeen of us and out of the seventeen there was a family named the Simons and the Simon family had eighteen children and all of the eighteen children went to St. Nicholas and finished from St. Nicholas, and we were talking one Sunday and we was, it really, it was just a shock because we had no idea that this was going to happen and like I said as until today I really don't know why.

NG: Did the church sell that land that the school building was on?

**Interviewee: Lucy Jackson**

**Interview: July 26, 2010**

LJ: No, we still have the land. The school was where the parish hall is.

NG: Okay.

LJ: And across the street was, across the street was where the parish hall, I mean the school was and...

NG: Behind the church?

LJ: Right on, right across from the parish hall.

NG: Okay.

LJ: Well, where the parish hall is now it used to have houses and St. Nicholas bought that property and this is when they had well... at first when they first bought the property it was a building but it wasn't like the, the parish hall wasn't like it is now. The parish hall was just maybe half of the size that it was you know, that it is now. Across the street was a school and they had a little yard on the side of the school and this is where we used to play and everything and not just the Catholic children that went to St. Nicholas, but the neighborhood, everybody was there you know, to play. They had a basketball goal and everything and we had bazaars every year and the children we had Mayfairs and everything.

NG: What street is that where the...

LJ: The school is on Bell between St. Charles and Live Oak.

NG: Was there tuition at that time? Did you ever have to pay tuition?

LJ: Yes, it was tuition, which wasn't too much. I can't quote the price because I don't know, but it wasn't that much. But during that time it was a lot to us you know, because my children, all, excuse me, my two oldest children went to St. Nicholas until they closed down in '67 and my two younger ones never had a chance to go to St. Nicholas School.

**Interviewee: Lucy Jackson****Interview: July 26, 2010**

But, and I couldn't tell, you know how much the tuition was. It wasn't that much, but like I said a lot of, during that time it was you know. But I couldn't quote the price.

NG: Were your parents educated?

LJ: No, my mother went to I think it was the seventh grade and my daddy went to the sixth grade, but during that time they were, I don't know, my father used to help us with geography and stuff you know, and sometimes we had stuff we had to go and look at the stars and he would go out there with us and you know, show us the brightest star and the Dipper you know, and everything and he was just up to date on stuff like that, but like I said they didn't go. One went to the sixth I think and one went to the seventh grade, but that was it.

NG: What made them make education important for you all?

LJ: Because they always said, I remember when we were coming up, they said that they wanted us to have the best because they wasn't able to get it and they strived hard for us to do so. My mother, she took in washing when I was going to school she took in washing. My father was working at Ellington Field. That's where he retired from and I was able to come home for the Christmas holidays, the summer holidays, and everything you know. They really worked hard to provide this education for me. This is why I tried to get my children you know, to get the education. My son, the one that stayed with me, he went to the service and everything and he finished, he's a pharmacy technician. That's what he graduated in. My other daughter she went to business school. One of my sons he went to college to TSU for two years and the youngest one she didn't go, but this is the way we you know, we try to do it. I have seven grandchildren and nine great grandchildren and this is what I'm striving for them you know, so they can get their

**Interviewee: Lucy Jackson****Interview: July 26, 2010**

education, in fact this is why I'm still working today you know, to help their parents to get them to get the education that they need.

NG: I can't think of what I was going to ask. You mentioned earlier that when you were working there that there were six lay teachers there, but when you were a student were there any lay teachers or were they all religious?

LJ: They were all religious teachers.

NG: Did you have any priests teaching or was it just nuns?

LJ: It was just nuns there. Well, sometimes they asked priests to come because they were trying to teach us the Latin because at that time you know, most of them were saying the mass in Latin and when we would attend mass in the mornings, after mass we would have religion classes and they would be there you know, to instruct us.

NG: What other classes did they have there?

LJ: You mean academic classes?

NG: Mhmm.

LJ: We had English, we had math, let me see, religion first, English, math, geography, we had science. Really, it was most of the classes that they have in public schools. The only thing at first we didn't have too much of physical education things and then eventually that's when we started off with the girls' and boys' basketball team, but as far as sports it wasn't too, too good like in the public schools, they have swimming and different things like that and we didn't have all that.

NG: Did you play basketball?

LJ: I played basketball, yes. I played at, in Tuskegee and at TSU. That was my major, physical education and I minored in child development.

**Interviewee: Lucy Jackson**  
**Interview: July 26, 2010**

NG: Do you think that you would have had the same opportunities had you gone to public school?

LJ: Yes and no. Catholic school I got my Catholic foundation and in public schools I probably would have had more sports, you know to participate in. But I don't regret any of the time that I spent at St. Nicholas because it made me a good person and I just enjoyed being there and I had to enjoy being there because I went back and taught there, you know so...

NG: What made you decide to go away to school to Tuskegee?

LJ: To Tuskegee? Really, my mother wanted me to go to \_\_\_\_\_ University but during that time they didn't have any dormitories and she didn't want us just to stay you know, in apartments or anything like that and I had some friends that were classmates too that were going to Tuskegee and so she decided to let me go ahead on over there. But at Tuskegee I did good, I played basketball, I ran track, and I traveled quite a bit you know, with the teams and that was a good experience for me.

NG: Did you work at all while you were in high school?

LJ: When I was in high school yes, at St. Joseph's Hospital. We worked there in the cafeteria you know, after school and on Saturdays we did you know, all day, eight hours.

NG: Did you have any other jobs before you started working at St. Nicholas?

LJ: Yes, when I finished from TSU I taught one year in Lake Charles, Louisiana at a Catholic School, Holy Ghost Catholic School. I taught there and then I used to say, "Why I'm way over here and they need people at my school?" and this is when I came and went to St. Nicholas.

NG: So when you started at St. Nicholas what were you teaching or did you have...

**Interviewee: Lucy Jackson**

**Interview: July 26, 2010**

LJ: I had the third grade...

NG: You had the third grade and then you taught them all subjects?

LJ: The third grade, yes, uh-hmm and I used to be the coach of the girls' basketball team. I look around today and some of those students that I taught in the third grade is now attending at St. Nicholas also. You know Theresa Gabriel?

NG: Mhhmm.

LJ: I taught her in the third grade. One of the ladies that sang in the choir with us, Mary Broussard, she you know, I taught her and Gloria Lamanse, I taught her and you know, and it's just amazing to see you know, but they tease me all the time and tell me, "Oh, this was my third grade teacher" and I'd say, "Yes, and if it wasn't for me" I'd say, "you all wouldn't be where you all are today you know," but I don't regret any of the time that I spent there. I really enjoyed it and it wasn't for the money because at that time we wasn't getting hardly anything. You know, I don't know how much we were getting paid, but it wasn't nothing. It was just that something I wanted to do to help others and of right now I'm not teaching, I'm not teaching, but I'm a principal at a "Head Start" program and the children are three and four and I enjoy that. I've been, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July I'll be there forty-two years which is half of my life you know, teaching and doing all this, so I enjoy every moment of it.

NG: Which Head Start program are you teaching, or are you principal now?

LJ: Perry Head Start. It's on Perry Street and the main streets is Cullen, no, yeah, Cullen and Martin Luther King is right catty-corner from the elementary school, Hartsfield Elementary School in the Sunnyside area.

NG: How long did you teach at St. Nicholas?

**Interviewee: Lucy Jackson****Interview: July 26, 2010**

LJ: Nine years. I started there in '58 and I stayed there until they closed in '67'.

NG: And then from there where did you go?

LJ: I worked about two months at Hobby Airport and the man that was over us he said, "What are you doing here?" and I said, "Well, I just wanted to work," and he says, "Hold on," and he got in contact with his wife and he told me, he said, "I want you to meet up with my wife at TSU." He said, "Saturday at..." I forgot what time it was and I said to myself, and I did and she is the one that got me in a Head Start and I stayed a teacher for three years and I progressed and this is when they made me, well some people call it principal, but really it's, in Head Start they call them site managers and I started off there and I started off in '68 'cause I stopped at St. Nicholas in '67 and I worked at the airport a couple of months and I started off with Head Start in July of '68 and I've been there ever since, but I enjoy you know working with children.

NG: Did you grow up, until you went away to college, on Live Oak? Did your family live there the whole time?

LJ: Yes, we stayed there the whole time.

NG: And when did you first move away? Besides I mean, after college?

LJ: When I got married in, ooh Lord. I'm trying, I don't even, but yeah I got married. I know, but this is where, this is when I moved and when I got married we lived in the Cuney homes. I don't know if you've heard of the cuney homes, but we stayed there and then for about two years. Then we bought a home in Blue Ridge Addition and we stayed there and my husband and I, we broke up and I came back and lived in Third Ward, yes.

NG: Where is Blue Ridge?

LJ: Blue Ridge is in South Union, like addition. Its addition called South Union. It's

**Interviewee: Lucy Jackson**

**Interview: July 26, 2010**

off of Martin Luther King and Reeds Road, up in that area.

NG: So when you moved back to Third Ward, you moved with your kids?

LJ: Ooh yeah, my kids, we all moved together and I never, excuse me re-married because I had two girls and I didn't want nobody you know, over my girls or nothing so it's just the way it turned out.

NG: So how difficult was it to raise them on your own?

LJ: It was hard. I was a mother and a father. When the boys went to play ball, I played ball, and when the girls wanted to play with the dolls, I played dolls. I was a momma and a daddy, but I didn't regret not any you know, any of it so it was hard but God gave me the strength and the courage and all of the four of them are living today and doing pretty good.

NG: Did you have all of them baptized and ...

LJ: All of them were baptized like they did me at six weeks, when they were six weeks old they was all baptized and when they were old enough they made their first communion, their confirmation and everything right there at St. Nicholas.

NG: When did you move out of the Third Ward?

LJ: When I did what?

NG: When did you move out of the Third Ward?

LJ: I moved out of Third Ward I would say, about nine years ago and I moved in a, not too far from here, it was called an addition, townhouses, Coppertree off of West Airport. They call it on the Southwest side, and that's where I stayed until I moved here in Stafford.

NG: I've spoken to a few parishioners that live far away from St. Nicholas but still go

**Interviewee: Lucy Jackson**  
**Interview: July 26, 2010**

there. Did you ever think about going to another church?

LJ: No ma'am. No ma'am. That's my parish church and no matter how far I have to travel, God give me the patience and the strength, I'll be there.

NG: What do you think it is about St. Nicholas that keeps people coming back?

LJ: Well really St. Nicholas is a historical church and I remember the times when I was growing up how we used, how we went to St. Nicholas and everything and I participated in the choir you know, and different organizations, I am a lady of all ladies. I don't, well the Ladies of the Auxiliary I've been a member ever since, I'd say twenty some odd years. I don't participate like I should but I've participated with the Ladies of the Auxiliary. Whenever they have functions and everything I contribute and my father, my grandfather was the founder of the Ladies and Knights of St. Peter Claver in the state of Texas and this is really, one of the, why I guess we're so close to St. Nicholas because that's where he went, to St. Nicholas. My grandfather, my parents, and you know everybody was right there at St. Nicholas and like I said we used to walk straight out line to go to church and went to St. Theresa Novena on Tuesday night. In fact, every time the church opened we were there. I guess that's what makes it so special.

NG: What do you think, how do you think that experience contributed to your life differently than you know, maybe somebody who didn't, that wasn't Catholic or who didn't spend so much time at St. Nicholas?

LJ: I don't know. I have some friends that go to St. Nicholas that's not even Catholic. I guess them hearing you know, us talk about it and one lady told me, she said, "Ms. Jackson, I just admire you for the way you carry yourself and everything" you know, and she asked me one day to come to church with me and ever so often she's there. So I guess

**Interviewee: Lucy Jackson****Interview: July 26, 2010**

it's the way you carry yourself and how you do and then the priests we have now, Father Desmond, he is so, he really tries to do and to get the older parishioners to come back to St. Nicholas and everybody really, along with me, we love him and we try to do whatever we can to help to bring these people back into the church you know? But like I said it's just a historical church and we want to keep it going and we trying to get the young ones to participate because when you get the young ones to participate you get more out of it because the parents have to come to bring the children you know, and this would be a big help you know, to encourage the children, the parents to come out.

NG: What do you see the importance of it being the first black Catholic church in Houston?

LJ: To me, when I first heard about it, it was a good while, St. Nicholas was the first church and they were the mothers of St. Francis Xavier, Mother of Mercy, a lot of the churches around here and to see them progress and knowing that St. Nicholas did all of this you know, it makes me feel good and I'm sure a lot of the other ones that know about it makes them feel the same way.

NG: You were mentioning your involvement with the church. What other organizations have you been involved in?

LJ: Just the Ladies of the Auxiliary, the choir, and just, well I can fit in you know, this is what I do.

NG: Can you tell me about the ladies auxiliary?

LJ: The ladies auxiliary is an organization, I couldn't tell you when it was originated, all I know that my grandfather was the founder of it in the state of Texas, and what they do, they help different organizations like the Mickey Leland Food Drive, they participate

**Interviewee: Lucy Jackson**  
**Interview: July 26, 2010**

in that and they visit the sick, and they have, well, they attend different conferences and everything to keep abreast of what's going on in the other ladies' auxiliary because it is nationwide and they give awards and everything every year just like Ms. Grant is going to receive one coming up by her being one of the oldest members in the organization. So there's quite a few things that they do and a lot of people are not aware of it because like the Mickey Leland Drive they do that okay, once a month they turn out, they bring canned goods and everything to help with the pantry, different things like that.

NG: What was your grandfather's name that started...?

LJ: A.E. Woodley. Albert Edgar Woodley.

NG: And he moved here from Louisiana?

LJ: Yes, uh-hmm.

NG: What about St. Peter of Claver? Can you tell me about it?

LJ: You mean the organization?

NG: Yes.

LJ: Okay, the Knights of Peter Claver, they really do the same as the ladies. They have food drives, they have different activities to raise money you know, to help the church, to help the needy and they go on different conventions and things to keep abreast of the men's side of the organization.

NG: Somebody told me that it was similar to the Knights of Columbus, but a black organization, the Knights of Peter Claver?

LJ: Yeah, the Knights of Peter Claver, okay to be a Knight of Columbus you have to be in an organization a certain amount of years in the Holy Name Society in order to belong to the Knights of Columbus. Like I'm a member of the Catholic Daughters which

**Interviewee: Lucy Jackson**  
**Interview: July 26, 2010**

is the sister to the Knights of Columbus, but like I said I don't turn out anything with them because when they was in Third Ward and when the building was in Third Ward, I used to participate but when they moved out into another area I wasn't able to you know, work and go attend the meetings and everything.

NG: I was wondering if the Knights of Peter Claver started because they weren't welcome in the Knights of Columbus. Do you have any...?

LJ: I really couldn't comment on that because I'm not abreast on that, you know...

NG: Okay.

LJ: And rather than say the wrong thing, I wouldn't comment on it. But I know we did have some guys that I know that one Knight of Columbus you know that, well one, two of us was from St. Nicholas and two or three of them was from St. Francis Xavier the church and they had been one for quite a while, but that's all I can say about it.

NG: I noticed that when I was looking through the history book that they did for the hundredth anniversary, I was looking at the priests and most of the priests were white priests.

LJ: Uh-huh, that was the Josephites, uh, Fathers that we had, but wasn't too many joining the organizations and the ones that they did have is getting older and they're not able to function like they used to and this is why we have the, really, the Mission of St. Paul.

NG: \_\_\_\_\_.

LJ: Uh-hmm. This is why we have them now.

NG: So the priests now are from the mission of St. Paul.

LJ: I'm thinking that's what it is, the Mission of St. Paul.

**Interviewee: Lucy Jackson**  
**Interview: July 26, 2010**

NG: Do you know how long ago that changed?

LJ: Now, in some of the Catholic churches they still have Josephite Fathers. I would say, I would say about, maybe between eight and ten years ago because all the while I was in school, in fact, really up until let me see, the last priest that we had it wasn't even eight or ten years ago it was, I would say maybe five or six years ago and we didn't have a pastor, well different ones would just come to the church and say the mass you know and everything. In fact, Father Desmond is really the first priest that we have that we can say he was a pastor after we got rid of the Josephites because the rest of them would just come to and fro with maybe one priest this Sunday, the next Sunday would be another priest you know, but Father Desmond is a St. Nicholas pastor and he's the first, I want to say \_\_\_\_\_, but anyway he's the first one that we've had assigned to our church.

NG: Was it the decision of the diocese to stop having the Josephite priests?

LJ: Well we didn't, no, we didn't have enough priests to really accommodate us, you know, and it's not just our church it's quite a few of the others you know, Catholic churches because like I said these young men are not going to be priests or everything. But at one time, we used to have at St. Nicholas when I was coming up, we used to have two and three priests there. But like I said they've gotten older, a lot of them are dead, and they have quite a few in the convalescent homes, you know.

NG: Do you think there is any difference in attitude or, I don't know if that's the right word, but is there any significance that the priest now is an African priest and not a white priest?

LJ: No, to me really it, it doesn't matter you know, as long as we are getting the service that you're supposed to get. I don't know how the rest of the people feel, but

**Interviewee: Lucy Jackson**  
**Interview: July 26, 2010**

\_\_\_\_\_ they must feel comfortable being with him because they attend church you know, and everything and they would have a choice. They could go right here to St. Francis Xavier which is Josephite Fathers, Mother of Mercy, they still have Josephites you know, priests. So I don't think by them being, you know.... [End of Side A].

NG: The population of St. Nicholas has gone down a lot...

LJ: It has been, yes, but it's building back up. I don't know if it's because of the people moving closer in, you know, town and everything, around the town is coming because I noticed, was it Sunday? That they had a couple that lived right across the street and they didn't know that that was a Catholic church over here you know, so I'm saying that each Sunday we do have visitors you know, and we welcome them to come back and some of them have come back you know and everything so hopefully it will build back up.

NG: What do you think contributed to the decline in parishioners?

LJ: What you mean?

NG: Why do you think people stopped coming?

LJ: Well, people moving out you know, in different areas and they say that you know, a lot of them say that, "Well you know, hey I've got a Catholic church right you know around the corner or not too far from me." Because when I rode to St. Nicholas I passed up two Catholic churches, but it's just that I just prefer going to St. Nicholas because that's where my roots are. So that's what it is. People are just moving out in different areas you know.

NG: And what role do you think St. Nicholas plays or has played in the community surrounding the church?

**Interviewee: Lucy Jackson****Interview: July 26, 2010**

LJ: Well like I said, we have the food pantry where people come in and they get you know, clothing, they get food, and they are welcomed when they come around, they're welcomed to come to the parish hall you know, and everything, and it, it's just, the doors always open, outsiders you know, visitors and everything to come to the parish and when you have a place like that they're going to bring their friends you know, to come to see you know, what's going on and everything and this is really how you get members.

NG: How is it different when that neighborhood was more residential?

LJ: It wasn't too many in that area that were Catholics. Like I said, they, the Catholics were just spread all over, but by this being the only black church that they had in that area, well most of the black people would just flock to the church you know. But like I said, during that time in that area there wasn't too many Catholics in that area.

NG: What about when there were bazaars or dances would people...

LJ: Oh yes ma'am. Yes ma'am. Well see, it was over there where the parking area was and we'd have the music and, you know, people passing by would hear the music and everything and we had booths out there so they would automatically stop, you know and we always had good turnouts, always have.

NG: Well, can you talk a little bit more about the bazaars?

LJ: Okay, the bazaars really is just to help the parish in the, the financial you know, bills and things, but they have, like each organization would have a booth like in September okay, the choir is going to have a booth you know, that we're going to run. The Knights of St. Peter Claver, they have booths. Each organization have booths and they raise the money you know, for the, at the bazaars they have different prizes that they give out and each parishioner they ask to be responsible for a certain amount of tickets.

**Interviewee: Lucy Jackson****Interview: July 26, 2010**

Like last year, each parishioner had to take a certain amount of tickets which added up to a hundred dollars. That goes toward the prizes and everything okay, it really and then it's something too, the parishioners can mingle, meet the different people you know, and everything and a lot of times they like to dance, they play bingo you know? It's just a socializing event that they have.

NG: And somebody told me in the past that there used to be dances?

LJ: Yes, they used to have dances, zydeco dances and everything and we're going to have one not too soon. It's going to be called "The Oldest and the Goodest" and we are hoping that the people will participate in that. We haven't had a dance at St. Nicholas in a good, good while, but when we did have the zydecos, a lot of people you know, they liked that music and they would come out and a lot of them that couldn't dance just came out just to see the other people dance and it was a good fundraiser and good fun you know.

NG: Did people from the neighborhood used to come to the dances like non-parishioners?

LJ: Ooh Lord, yes. Yes, they did and they came from different churches you know. Like if we would hear that Mother of Mercy was having a zydeco and you know, the people that like the zydeco they go anywhere you know, and then it's the zydeco people that's playing you know, a lot of people like J. Paul and Tipton\_\_\_\_\_ you know, different bands, and they participate and at the bazaars a lot of times. They have a tent not at our church but the other churches, they have a tent where they have the zydeco bands to come out and they just dance you know, under the shade and everything and this brings a lot of people out too.

**Interviewee: Lucy Jackson**

**Interview: July 26, 2010**

NG: Did they used to charge to get into the dances?

LJ: When they would have them in the parish hall, yes they would charge. Maybe I would say, like ten dollars pre-sale, maybe twelve dollars at the door and they would and that's the way it would function like that and then they would sell, like gumbo and stuff like that you know, but it used to be a good turnout when they did have it.

NG: And how did people go dressed to the dances?

LJ: Western. Well, if you had the Western you know, attire they could. A lot of people just wore you know, just regular clothes and they had some people that really, really knew how to zydeco. A lot of us we just danced, but it is certain things that they, a certain dance that they do call it zydeco you know, dancing. But when I go I just dance, keep up with the music you know.

NG: So do you like zydeco?

LJ: I love it. I love it. I don't know how to do it too good, but I'll get out there and try.

NG: St. Nicholas still has a lot of celebrations where there's food...

LJ: Where they what?

NG: Where there's food, where they serve food.

LJ: Yeah, uh-huh, it's different, really different organizations that may have you know, something this Sunday, then the next Sunday you know, like that and then just parishioners just bring stuff and that's just for the parishioners to go to the parish hall and mingle with each other you know, and things like that.

NG: Can you talk about some of the traditional foods that people bring when there's you know, a big event, what kind of food people....

**Interviewee: Lucy Jackson**  
**Interview: July 26, 2010**

LJ: It all depends on what kind of event it is, like the last event we had was for Father's Day and we had somebody that was over it and they discussed before this event was and asked what type of food that we think you know, we wanted to have and we laughed about for Father's Day because we know Father Desmond loves chicken so we said we was just going to have chicken, and we made a menu out of it and this is how different people said that they would bring so and so, and so you know and whatever event it is like for the \_\_\_\_\_ day celebration at the end of the year we start off, like in January, the people in January get together get together and they decide what they want and you know, each month they do it like that. I think it's June it's just three parishioners that we know of that have a birthday in June, and Father Desmond is one of the three and so they chose to have just a drink because they say in the summertime people love to drink you know, cold stuff to keep you know, so this is really how we you know, we get it. We don't just say, "I'm going to do so, and so, and so." We get the menu together and then we ask the parishioners you know, what would you like to bring out of the menu you know, stuff like this.

NG: And what is some of the foods that people bring?

LJ: Dirty rice, potato salad, beans, different types of meat like chicken. They may bring brisket. I know once or twice I brought a roast you know, and they have eggplant. I don't know if you know what that is, but they have eggplant, they have salad, tossed salad, they have fruit, different fruits, and they have cakes, they have cookies, pies, things like that.

NG: And for some of them like you said for the dances that they serve gumbo...

LJ: They serve gumbo, boudain. They didn't sell, they sold gumbo, they sold

**Interviewee: Lucy Jackson**

**Interview: July 26, 2010**

boudain, beer, sodas, you know, things like that.

NG: And for the breakfasts, when they have breakfasts, what kind of foods?

LJ: They have grits, eggs, different sausages, pan sausage, different types of pan sausages, they have sausage, bacon, and toast, and a couple of times they've had biscuits, and they've had waffles and syrup you know, like that. But, most of the time, really it's grits, eggs, and bacon, or pan sausage.

NG: And how important are these kinds of events for the parish?

LJ: Really, like I said, it's just really to bring the people together to you know, mingle with each other you know.

NG: Did ya'll have any social events at the school when you were going to school?

LJ: Yes, we had matinees, Mayfairs, and different organizations. We had, like in May, every Monday during the month of May which is the Blessed Mother's month, well at the end of the school, at the end of the hall we used to have the Blessed Mother statue there and one young child, a girl, would go and just crown the Blessed Mother and everybody would be in the hall you know, singing the hymns to the Blessed Mother. We had this, we had basketball games you know, things like this.

NG: Matinees, are those dances?

LJ: Matinees, yes, uh-huh, but they're given in the afternoons like I would say, like two to six or something like that. That's what they would have, the matinees, like that.

NG: Was it just people from the school that went?

LJ: Everybody that we would pass the word around and anybody that wanted to come you know. This is how we did it. It wasn't just our children, it was you know, neighborhood children, the friends of the school children and everything.

**Interviewee: Lucy Jackson**

**Interview: July 26, 2010**

NG: And what kind of music did they play?

LJ: The record player.

NG: So, popular music?

LJ: Yes, uh-hmm, yes. That's the way we used to operate.

NG: What are Mayfairs?

LJ: Mayfairs is like when each classroom would have different dances and things you know, like we may, I don't know, like the maypole is a high stand and they have different strings coming down and each child would have a string and you may go under this person and over this person like that and when they would get through with it, it would make a [ ] and that was what we called a maypole and they would just have different activities you know, dances and things. Maybe the first grade would do this, the second grade do this, you know, and that's where they got the name from, the Mayfair.

NG: Was it a seasonal thing? Did it happen...

LJ: We had it just about every year. It was something to really look forward to you know, and the bazaars was also something to look forward to.

NG: What about when your children were in school?

LJ: When my children was in school I let them participate just like the rest of them and we used to have plays when we were coming up you know, and my daughter, my oldest daughter, she used to like to sing and we've had plays and stuff and sometimes she would you know, sing in a part of it and stuff like that and with whatever the sisters would want them to participate in I was there for them you know, "Ms. Jackson do you think you could get so and so for your daughter?" "Yes, sister," and I would be determined to get her because I didn't want just because they didn't have a father that

**Interviewee: Lucy Jackson**  
**Interview: July 26, 2010**

they didn't have and I kept up with them just like you know, the other children did.

NG: I spoke to Ms. Southern the other day and she was talking about the king and queen...

LJ: We used to have a king and queen contest and my son he won one year with the king and queen contest. They had the pictures in the hall a while back. It was some kind of event they had and they had our pictures from way back, but I know he won the king. I don't know what grade he was in or whatever, but it was at St. Nicholas, when they had the school they had the nuns there and everything and we used to go out and ask different companies you know, to donate towards our organization and this is how in the booklet they would advertise their business you know. And like a lot of them they would say, I'm just saying, for my son, like Johnson Funeral Home you know, to James Jackson from Johnson Funeral Home. They would advertise their business and they had a price for the full page, half page, the fourth of a page, just the patrons you know, the names and everything and I know when he ran, I know it was over five hundred dollars you know, and we used to have that all the time.

NG: What happened at the end of the contest? What kind of...

LJ: They would crown the king and the queen and give them a little gift you know, and something like that, then they would have a little matinee afterwards.

NG: Do you have any idea when the priests stopped living in the rectory?

LJ: The last you know, and I can't tell you when the last Josephite priest was, but the Josephite priests was the last ones that stayed in there, but I can't remember what year it was. But not any of the, I don't know why I'm saying SVDs, not any of them lived there, but...

**Interviewee: Lucy Jackson**  
**Interview: July 26, 2010**

NG: The mission of St. Paul Priests, do you mean?

LJ: Okay, it was just the Josephites that lived there and I don't know what year it was, but they used to, like I say they would use to have two or three there at all times. It stayed vacant for a good while and that's when they started using it for the office, but I'm thinking when Father Desmond had this convention going on for the Nigerian priests, quite a few of them stayed at St. Nicholas. I think upstairs is still like it used to be when you know, the Josephites were there.

NG: And when did St. Nicholas stop having nuns or when did they stop...

LJ: When the school closed down in '67, they stopped having nuns at St. Nicholas, but they still had them, you know, like at Mother Mercy, St. Phillip \_\_\_\_\_ and everything. They, they still, in fact, I don't think we have any sisters of the holy family in Houston anymore. They're in different areas you know, where they have Catholic schools. See, they closed down Mother of Mercy and they don't have any over there. St. Phillip \_\_\_\_\_ has closed down. St. Francis never had a school there so they don't have any in this area. But the mother house for the sisters of the holy family is in New Orleans and we use to go over there every year in July for the holy family alumni and each chapter would try to raise money during the year to bring to the convention and that was for them to keep their buildings and things going, but when the school closed down and everything we just stopped going, but I still go there just about every year you know to see because I still have some friends that taught my children you know in school and I just go every so often just to show my appreciation to let them know that I appreciate what they did to help my children.

NG: Why did the school close?

**Interviewee: Lucy Jackson****Interview: July 26, 2010**

LJ: Lack of funds. Children started scattering around, going here and there. They wasn't able to function like they were supposed to have been functioning so they closed it down.

NG: Going back to talking about the sisters. There are some sisters that attend St. Nicholas now. Are they affiliated with the church or...?

LJ: I want to say no and the reason why I say no is because they don't, I'm thinking they're just living there you know, because they don't help with the CCED, you know, classes or anything so I don't know because the building, the house they staying in didn't belong to us. They bought it when the Nigerian priests came. They're the ones that bought this building and, but the person that owned that building, I don't know if it was a halfway house or some kind of house or whatever, but I knew the people real good that owned it and I'm thinking that they let them have it you know, for little or nothing or something like that because they grew up parishioners at St. Nicholas, but I don't know. I know one or two of them are going to school at the community college downtown so that's about all I can say about that.

NG: How do you see St. Nicholas's future in terms of being able to survive financially and grow?

LJ: I, well really it's really by people putting envelopes in church on Sundays and the different activities that we have to participate in order to you know, to meet their financial you know, bills and stuff.

NG: Do you think it's important for St. Nicholas to survive as a parish?

LJ: Ooh yes. I hope so, yes, and I'm saying because it's a historical church and they have the landmark and everything. Hopefully they never will you know, move on.

**Interviewee: Lucy Jackson****Interview: July 26, 2010**

Because I know at one time, before St. Nicholas was really in operation we used to go to this church downtown, I think it was Annunciation, and at that time, the blacks just had two rows of seats to sit, the last two seats, and then after St. Nicholas started when they opened up, that's when people started coming to St. Nicholas and that was really the only black Catholic church that they had in the area and this is why they call it the mother church.

NG: Do you think the church has changed a lot, the parishioners have changed a lot over the years?

LJ: Yes, I think because when I was coming up, the priests, we never did see the priests' face. Everything they did their back was to us you know, it wasn't like it is now, you can see them and that was a big change for us and our choir used to be upstairs and everything where they couldn't see us and everything is where now you can see the priest, what he's doing, you can see the choir, how they're operating and everything, so it really is a big change that we've had.

NG: Do you think it's better now?

LJ: I think so because you know, and then the priests used to say the mass in Latin and we didn't know what they were saying you know? Then they changed it over to English so that was a big change you know, and people could really understand, see, and hear you know, better like that.

NG: Is there anything else you were hoping to talk about or anything you think is really important for people to know?

LJ: Well, not really. I just hope that St. Nicholas will continue to grow and the membership is just, people will start coming back you know, to their home parish and

**Interviewee: Lucy Jackson**

**Interview: July 26, 2010**

that's my dream, that they would do so.

NG: You had some stuff written down. Is there anything that we missed from...

LJ: No, I just had a...

NG: Were you, did you get a chance to talk about all of those things?

LJ: \_\_\_\_\_ and I did tell you about, yeah about the playgrounds used for the Mayfairs and the bazaars and you know the property where the school is now. There's a playground, well the playground now is the parking area. I didn't say anything about the St. Nicholas School had an active PTA...

NG: Oh, can we talk about that a little?

LJ: Yes, the parishioners that had children in the schools they really, really participated in it and, like my parents, and a whole lot of the other parents whatever that was asked of them to do they did it and everything and, like I said, they ran the cafeteria, no pay, just volunteer work, and everything and most of the time they would bring what they had to cook you know, and this is really how they operated and even if my mother and them would be up there cooking, I still had to pay for my food you know, this is just the way that they did.

NG: Do you think they were so active because they were involved with St. Nicholas or do you think it was a different time? Were parents different than they are now?

LJ: Yeah, during that time the parents didn't mind doing things for free, but the parents nowadays you know, very seldom you will catch some of them that would just go and do something like that for free you know, even if they did have children in the schools. They would try to go somewhere where they could make money you know, but during that time they just volunteered. And the family I was telling you about that had the

**Interviewee: Lucy Jackson**

**Interview: July 26, 2010**

eighteen children thier name was Ben and \_\_\_\_\_ Simon and they had eighteen children of which fourteen of them graduated from St. Nicholas and the Simon's had the largest number of children to graduate from the school and I also \_\_\_\_\_ about the teachers that the lay teachers that you know, that they had and I told you about the nuns that graduated from St. Nicholas and the priests that graduated from St. Nicholas.

NG: There was one thing I wanted to ask you about. Discipline in the school, what was that like?

LJ: Well, when we were coming up, they didn't have no problem with us because during that time, the teachers could whip, the neighbors could whip, and then when we'd get home and our parents would find out about it we'd get another whipping when we would get home, but that was during that time. It was \_\_\_\_\_. I'm saying this, that when they took prayers out of school this is when, that's when the conflict started. I really think that's what it is. You can't hit a child, you can't discipline or nothing, and the children know this nowadays and they just act up whereas we couldn't do nothing like that because I remember the lady that lived next door to us, when my mother would go somewhere and she would see us doing wrong she would call us in there like if we were one of her children and she would whip us and everything and then my mother would come home and she would tell my mother and that was another whipping there, you know. \_\_\_\_\_ there was nothing we could do about it, but these children in school nowadays, even the three and four year olds where I am, they tell you, "You can't do nothing to me," you know, this is what they hear from home and it's just altogether different.

NG: Okay, is there anything else that you wanted to mention?

LJ: Uh, no that's just about it. I just hope St. Nicholas continues to grow.

NG: Okay, thank you.

