

Earnestine Atkins: Family took care of family. I don't care if I were at a mile or two miles away from my house, family took care of family.

Tunga White: If something might happen where mother died, one of the household's in the community, would the other families be there to rally to support them?

Earnestine Atkins: They would go to the homes, they would take food to the homes. They would assist in any way possible. Most time when that happens, that's a good reunion. I would say everybody from the community, the chicken, the dogs and everything, everybody come together. I mean that's just how it worked.

Tunga White: Would sometimes different families take in the children if things happen?

Earnestine Atkins: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Matter of fact, different family, they would never let the child go out of the family too. During that time there was no such thing as foster care and whatever. There would always be another family member that was take over that family, those children. And doing, I think that how foster care seems to come about to me in a sense of speaking, because if my cousin, if my grandmother child died and company would come over there, then another family member would take in those children just to not have a lot of children around during funerals and during wakes and stuff like that. They would say, "Okay, you all sent all children to my house and I'll watch the kids while you all go to visit, reap with the family."

Earnestine Atkins: Then during those times, they used to have these things in the home. They didn't have parlors, they didn't have the funeral parlors and stuff. They used to have wakes and the body in the homes, in the living room of the house. So in those days. I'll never forget my grandmother living room.

Tunga White: So you had it in the home of person that—

Earnestine Atkins: Deceased. Yeah.

Tunga White: And was it [indistinct 00:02:05] similar to the wakes we have now?

Earnestine Atkins: Very similar. Matter of fact it was more spiritual then than it is now, to me. There was a sacred something about wakes and burials than it is now. Now it's more, I would say, sophisticated in a sense of speaking.

Tunga White: Does it seem more like these days it's more like a drive through process?

Earnestine Atkins: Yeah. It just doesn't have that stickability, just don't have that realism to it. You see what

I'm saying? It's really difficult doing a wake, man, people used to walk for miles and used to be a—People didn't talk while they were mourning. People would just pray and sing and do spirituals and all those kinds of things. And it was a sacred moment. It was a sacred day. It's just different.

Tunga White: Now, you said that at that time, you didn't have funeral homes to take care of [indistinct 00:03:14]. What kind of process would after the death of somebody. Can you kind of walk me through the process from the death to the actual burial?

Earnestine Atkins: As I can remember, the wake would be at the home, the mortician—We had morticians during those time, as I remember, when I was born. But being that they didn't have a lot of cars and things, the mortician would come, they would fix the body up at the home, and then they would put them in a casket box, whatever and they would set everything up right there at the home. And then after that which they would take it from the home to the grave site, and then they would have a little service there and then six feet under.

Tunga White: Now what kind of time period are we talking about? From the time of death until the wake, how long would the body sit for people to view and then—

Earnestine Atkins: The body would sit—Gosh, let's see if I can remember. The body would sit, I know for all day in the home of the wake. Even overnight, I can remember some. And then someone at some point, they would take them away. Then they would bring them back. And gosh, my last one I remember was my grandma, who was in the house. And people came around to view, have spiritual prayers and things like that, and they kept the body there and took the body straight to the graveyard and had it buried. It seemed like prior to that, they used to leave the body overnight in the house, it seems like. Ask someone else that and make sure, but I think [indistinct 00:05:21] to leave the body in the house overnight.

Tunga White: Did they have hearses back then like they do now? How would they transport the body from house to the funeral?

Earnestine Atkins: From my time, they had hearses, like one or two, my time. But my mother could tell they me, they used to have horse with a wagon and they would put the body on the wagon and bring it on the cart. Take it that way.

Tunga White: So you said they would, in your mother's day, use a horse?

Earnestine Atkins: Yeah, horse and buggy. Horse and buggy type thing. Yeah.

Tunga White: I wanted to jump back to something you mentioned earlier. You were talking about the things your mother would tell you about boys. Did you court, growing up?

Earnestine Atkins: Yeah. No, I really didn't. I really didn't a lot. Honestly, I didn't. I really didn't. I remember when I was in the sixth grade and a guy had liked me, he was in the eighth grade. Now, remember I was at,

called elementary high school, but we were all together, cross the fence and I remember this guy used to send messages with another, his cousin with me. We used to talk across the fence distance, you see what I'm saying? Or see each other. That was as most as we could, just kind of talk and say, "You got my note?" Kind of thing and that kind of thing. And even when I was in the eighth grade, he was in a 10th grade. During those time, we like junior prom and I remember this guy took me to the junior prom and we had liked each other, let's say, from the sixth to that time, and there through high school, when I finished high school, kind of. And he and I went to the prom, junior prom and we didn't even know what to do.

Earnestine Atkins: I mean if we could've gone and had sex, we didn't even know what to do. And we didn't. Throughout those whole years, we never, even up until today. That same guy, we still admire each other, but it's not an intimate relationship. It's just that we know that we liked each other when we were younger and we never had any connection in terms of sex. We always say we owe each other ourselves to at least go out one time, but we never did. But now, we have become very good friends until—Now, he's now married and has grown children who are married.

Earnestine Atkins: But we can now talk about that, and he can talk to me about his personal problems and his girlfriends that he has, them type things and 'cause we all in the same organization, he's amazing, I'm a star. So we can talk about those things now. But we respect each other, and people would think honestly that we probably may have something going on, because when we are together we laugh and we talk and we kind of talk about things that people don't understand and why were we sweethearts and why we not now, but then you're so close? That kind of thing.

Earnestine Atkins: I went to college—I didn't have a boyfriend through high school. One guy I did like when I was in 11th grade, 11th through 12th grade, and he was—Well, he was going to Robert Small School in Beaufort now. But we lived closer together, because I lived in Ladies Island, he lived in Ladies island. But we went to different school. The boundary line changed, and he and I never had a sexual or real intimate relationship either, other than just my mother used to operate a juke joint, and we used to meet that talking and call ourselves seeing each other through that. But even through that, from what my mother taught me, he and I really have not really gotten sexually involved because of my teaching my mother gave me. And then he was a year out of school before me, so he left and went into the military, and so he and I just lost out on that, with that relationship.

Earnestine Atkins: I ran into another guy, and this is in '68, '69, who was in the Marine Corps, and we dated each other for 14 years. That was really my first opportunity to say, to really date and go out and know what life was more.

Tunga White: A real type relationship.

Earnestine Atkins: A real type relationship. That was the only first time. And that was really almost after college, actually. I met a young man in college my first year, second year there, and he was to the technical college, I was to the college. So during that time, it was strict there, because they have these matron that watches you in the dorm and you—

Tunga White: Just like a mother, huh?

Earnestine Atkins: That's right, you have to keep your barrier there, and when you have company, then either you sit in the dormitory space that you have company, or you be out in the yard, in the field, with the trees, in eyesight, in vision that they can see you. So that wasn't a relationship. So I didn't too much have a relationship with him. So he left, and he went in the army, and after that, a year after, he got married. So I really didn't have a lot of intimate sexual relationship. Then I always kind of preserved myself from that same teaching my mom taught me. And for whatever reason, I thought really if you talk to a guy, you would get pregnant. And if you kiss him, I mean I just knew I was pregnant. So I kind of back off.

Tunga White: Let me ask you. Okay, your courting, so you didn't do any courting really when you were growing up in your mother's household. Was that because she didn't allow that, or it's just your mindset that you just didn't want to get involved with a man?

Earnestine Atkins: It was really both. My mother deeply didn't really allow that. Really. And if we did, we had to sneak. You see what I'm saying? And when you have to sneak, you didn't get the opportunity, because she always kept you in a place where you can't—She always kind of know where you are kind of thing. 'Cause we really never went out a lot, say "I'll just go out with the girls." Or just leaving home, walking and going. We really never did a lot of that, because she always kind of kept tabs on us. Now she was strict in her own way, but we had opportunities. But then because she taught us so well, I utilized my opportunity to my best advantage. I just figure what her word was, was God giving words. I just kind of been mindful of what she said. So I just got to back off on a lot of things.

Tunga White: Now, was she like this with all your siblings?

Earnestine Atkins: All of them. Except for the younger ones. My youngest sister—The last four, I should say. Or the last five. Things change.

Tunga White: Why did things change?

Earnestine Atkins: I have a sister that's a year younger than me. In between her and my brother is a gap. There's like five or six years drop in children. Then she started off again. You see what I'm saying? So that little generation had different—

Tunga White: She mellowed.

Earnestine Atkins: That little last group kind of had more—

Tunga White: And it was a different time.

Earnestine Atkins: Right. Different time and things bloom and things change. And they had more, and they

did more. Opportunities began to spread and they did just did more. 'Cause what now, what right now I would've done in my mother house when I was my brother's age, when I was his age, I could never do what he's doing now. I could never take a boyfriend to my house. I couldn't even never take a boyfriend to my house and say "He sleep with my brother and I sleep with—" T.

Tunga White: That wasn't good enough either.

Earnestine Atkins: No, no, not then. Not my time. But since that last generation came, they did that, because all of them brought their girlfriend home with them and the girlfriend couldn't sleep with them. She would never allow that. Never. Even me, I don't do that now. We'd never allow that. But at least they could sleep with a family member. You see what I'm saying?

Tunga White: As long as it wasn't in the room together.

Earnestine Atkins: Exactly. And right now, I don't play.

Tunga White: When you look back at that, you're [indistinct 00:13:55] experiences because of your mother's [indistinct 00:13:57], her teachings, college, [indistinct 00:14:01].

Earnestine Atkins: Has a lot to do—

Tunga White: Do you feel that you were cheated out of kind of growing up and experimenting with things even in the colleges?

Earnestine Atkins: No, I don't feel I was cheated, because I felt if I really was mischief enough to decide, "Well, let me see what she really mean. I shouldn't do this. Going do it anyway." I could have done that, because I did have opportunities now., In my last year of college, I was on campus, I had my own car. I could go and do anything I want. Now, I really got grown then. I really got grown. But still within my heart and soul, I still monitor myself.

Earnestine Atkins: I mean, I went out to the clubs every night, played cards, did this, rage drop, everything. The whole works. I mean I was wild. But still within my heart and soul that something was there that didn't allow me to do that. Another thing that really triggered me off is that the same first boyfriend I told you I had, he was in eighth, I was sixth. There was a group of them that lived in a small community down this way, and they would call themselves the bad guys. You know what I'm saying, bad guys. They could have any woman they want. They could date anybody, they could do anything to woman.

Earnestine Atkins: And those things get out. And he was a part of that connection. They used to call themselves the Four F's because of calling, "Find them, Fool them, Fuck them, and Forget them."

Tunga White: They were bad.

Earnestine Atkins: Right. And when I heard about that, that sent a message. And I said, "Well, hey look, he's with that group, but he ain't going to never have the opportunity to do—" And that within itself hindered me to do a lot of things, even when I went to college. And I used to go, my mother always said, "Take care of yourself. You never know what's out there." And that was just a mental block that I had this, so I really was very extra careful. Now, mind you, I had plenty of opportunities with men, 'cause I was real—

Earnestine Atkins: Oh man, I had a little bottle there. And I used to play ball and I used to dance. I used to get off and I knew I could catch them, but it was just something there that I just never let myself go with men. I just didn't. I can't understand it for the world. I could've been married four or five times. Never been married a day of my life. Never. I just didn't. I traveled a lot and through my job when I got out of college. I used to be on the road all the time, do workshop training, do training, those kind of things. Lot of men. Men my father's age who wants to go to bed with me, you see what I'm saying?

Earnestine Atkins: But I just always kept that low profile with them and it's all because of my mom. And I'm glad today, because those things come back. You see what I'm saying? And yeah, you remember, I had a man told me he's working in the statehouse right now, in Columbia. He said [indistinct 00:17:20], "I remember you were so petite. Remember that time we went to that meeting in such and such a place and you had said something and I think [indistinct 00:17:27], and that was kind of telling me was all right if you and I can get together." And I remember it very well. I remember it specifically very well. And I did indicate to him that maybe it could have been a way that we could have gotten together. But in that same breath, I portrayed that, but I really deeply in my heart didn't mean that, and it never happened.

Earnestine Atkins: So he always remembered that. He said, "Yeah." He said, "You owe me one too." But I'm glad because people, I just don't like people to say, "Well Earnestine, I've been there. I know what—" It's just a mental block. [indistinct 00:18:07]. And I just have a problem with that. I don't want men, especially, to think that, "Hey look, I know what she's all about." I don't even want them to have the opportunity. And I think that has a lot to do with even my now relationship. So I have a friend, but I don't go out the way to entertain a lot of men, because a lot of people respect me in a lot of ways. And they think, "Well hey, Earnestine is such and such and I know I can go in when I get ready. I know I can get into her pants when I get ready." And I just don't let them get that opportunity to do that. I let them respect me fully. I let them want it. Not get it and know. You do [indistinct 00:18:50] what I'm trying to say? Yeah. Okay.

Tunga White: So when did you [indistinct 00:19:09]. When did you find out the truth about [indistinct 00:19:09].

Earnestine Atkins: In college.

Tunga White: [indistinct 00:19:10].

Earnestine Atkins: Really, really, in college.

Tunga White: Were there, when you were growing up, were there girls your age that were getting pregnant?

Earnestine Atkins: Not too many. There were some, yeah, there were some, now, but fewer than more.

Tunga White: Okay. What age would you say that [indistinct 00:19:41]? Early to late teens?

Earnestine Atkins: I would say 16, 17? Yeah.

Tunga White: And what would happen if a girl gets pregnant? As far as the community dealing with her and everything.

Earnestine Atkins: They would drop out of high school and—First of all, drop out of high school. Most of them would go away. Just leave town, have the baby, and just come back later on in life. General. The others who had babies just didn't come back to school. They just kind of went to night school years after. The majority of them just went away, actually.

Tunga White: Would they go live with relatives?

Earnestine Atkins: Relatives up north.

Tunga White: What was the church's take on that? If one of the girls that go to the church got pregnant? What the church do? Did they do anything or just—

Earnestine Atkins: Well, if you are a member of the church when you got pregnant, then you would have to, when you have your baby, you have to go back to the church and ask for something like forgiveness. Well, I'm not sure we call it that. But you ask, if you want to come back, you would have to go up to the body of the church and said something like you have made a mistake and out of wedlock and you wanted to come back to your church. And then the church would have to yes or no, approve you coming back. But it's differently now. People just have babies and come back.

Tunga White: Would the guy who got the girl pregnant, would he kind of have a shotgun thing trying to get him to marry her?

Earnestine Atkins: No. No.

Tunga White: It wasn't no pressure?

Earnestine Atkins: No. It wasn't no pressure. Most times, if one got married, they would either go and get married or they would just not get married. The families, I don't think were that strong to fight the battle. I think they would just tell him that you have a baby, that you ought to marry her. And some [indistinct 00:22:01] they're just going to get married. If not, the mothers just leave it like this.

Tunga White: Do you ever hear of any girls getting abortions or trying to have abortions?

Earnestine Atkins: Not many. Only one girl that I know that went to school with me, I think she tried to. She died from that.

Tunga White: She did it herself, on [indistinct 00:22:23]?

Earnestine Atkins: I think she did it herself.

Tunga White: And this was high school?

Earnestine Atkins: High school. I guess I was in 10th or 11th grade.

Tunga White: Did you ever hear how she tried to do this?

Earnestine Atkins: No, I never.

Tunga White: How did the people say she died [indistinct 00:22:44]?

Earnestine Atkins: They said she was pregnant. She took a overdose and she just tried to kill the baby and she just died the process. She took something.

Tunga White: So they were kind open about the way she died. Okay. I knew your mother was strict about your dealing with boys. Was there a lot of other rules in the household coming up?

Earnestine Atkins: Yep, there were. When you go out, you'd be back a certain time and she would give you that time. Most time, different times. And it depends where you went. If you went to the movies, it was with a different time, because you would have to go to the movies in the evening, and you would need to be back home when the movie's over, like 7:00. Or if you go out at 4:00, you should be back by 7:00. It's hardly every time you go out in the evening like 7:00 and come back at 9:00. We didn't do that, because we didn't have cars, so we had to hitchhike a ride or go with a friend, a family friend.

Earnestine Atkins: If you went out to a dance, she get would give you a certain time you leave the house, a certain time. If you had to go do those times. We used to play ball, we used to have community ball teams. If we went to play ball, we used to go out—She knew we would play a ball between 4:00 and 7:00, so after dark, you had to get back home.

Earnestine Atkins: Where else we went? We didn't too much go on vacation or go out of town much at all. Well, church is always during the day. We didn't have a lot. And if we go in the communities, say if we just go walking, visiting families and friends, all of our chores would have to have been done before we leave home. Even if we had to play ball, we had to make sure if she gives our chores, all those things had to be done before leaving. And no questions asked. If it wasn't done, you just didn't play that day. We didn't go out a lot, so I guess—Not that we were in the church so much, we just didn't. Since she had the juke joint, we were

there with her all the time. And that's where everybody else came and met up. All other friends came and met there. We had our fun there.

Tunga White: Now, how far was this from your home?

Earnestine Atkins: Walking distance. I mean, it wasn't close like from here to Frizzell. Probably from here to, post office, maybe.

Tunga White: Okay. A mile or so?

Earnestine Atkins: Yeah.

Tunga White: So what was the name of it?

Earnestine Atkins: We used to call it The Packing House. 'Cause it was an old packing house at first.

Tunga White: Now this was open to—Did it cater to young adults?

Earnestine Atkins: No, mostly older. It was catered to young adults when—Right next to the place, we used to have a ball field, and this is where we played a lot of ball. So whoever came to the ballgame. There were children. The children come and after dark the children would go home and teenagers and grown ups, all would stay. It used to be one of the sole major place in the community for people. All of us in [indistinct 00:26:20] to come to. So we always kept people, always. It was a good business outlet for my parents, because even I worked there. Even I sold beer, even I sold booze. And I was underage doing those [indistinct 00:26:39]. They weren't so strict. Even I used to fry chicken, fish and—

Tunga White: So you served alcohol? Meat, food, [indistinct 00:26:43].

Earnestine Atkins: Oh yeah sir. Whatever there was to be done, I did.

Tunga White: And they'd play music?

Earnestine Atkins: Juke joint had jukebox.

Tunga White: And they would play some cards and stuff?

Earnestine Atkins: Play cards and play—They didn't play a lot of cards, but they did play [indistinct 00:27:03] pool. Pool. That's what I thought.

Tunga White: So did you pay to get in there, or pay for everything you got once you was in there?

Earnestine Atkins: Both. When we had dance, they had to pay to get in, then pay for what they got. If we

didn't have a dance, then they paid for whatever they wanted to get.

Tunga White: So was it open, how many nights? Was it open in the daytime, too?

Earnestine Atkins: It was open evenings. Mostly on Friday and Saturday nights.

Tunga White: And who owned it?

Earnestine Atkins: I don't know. I don't know who owned that place. I believe it was community. It was a school a long time ago, or either was a packing house a long time ago and it went to school. But I went there a few times, a few days for school. Then it turned into that. I don't know who [indistinct 00:28:07] owned that place.

Tunga White: Is it still—

Earnestine Atkins: No, no, no. It's a house now. They pulled it down and built a house in the same spot.

Tunga White: Where exactly [indistinct 00:28:17]?

Earnestine Atkins: That's right when you turn in to go to Jerome house.

Tunga White: Where?

Earnestine Atkins: In that fence.

Tunga White: Okay. I know where-

Earnestine Atkins: Soul Palace. The Soul Palace was on one side, it was right on the next side. You see that there? You see that pretty house in that fence? That's exactly where it was. I mean, in the exact spot. And see the Soul Palace, and that was the thing. During that time, that was the center of St. Helena. Because people from all different areas united right there.

Tunga White: Now, the Soul Palace was the same type of establishment back then?

Earnestine Atkins: Two first cousins owned it. My mother's first cousin run that, is my mother ran the other one.

Tunga White: Could you kind of give me a time when each place started, when places started? It's probably about the same time?

Earnestine Atkins: Well, so the Soul Palace probably was first. Yeah. 'Cause the Soul Palace was really a two-story building once upon a time. They used to live in it. They used to live upstairs. It used to be a store long

time ago. God, I'll tell ya. That place used to be a store with living quarters upstairs years ago. Gosh, thinking. Then across the street from it was another store. Course, it's not the building or nothing is there now. Gosh, that was a long time.

Tunga White: So the people who ran it lived up there?

Earnestine Atkins: Same people who operate it now lived.

Tunga White: Oh, so same family?

Earnestine Atkins: That would be another family too that you can talk with.

Tunga White: And what would [indistinct 00:30:21]

Earnestine Atkins: Ernestine Morgan.

Tunga White: So you started, you worked there as a teenager?

Earnestine Atkins: Teenager, yeah.

Tunga White: Now, you said that the activities that there were for teenagers was to go to movies, dancing, ball.

Earnestine Atkins: Yeah, movies, dances, ball games and church.

Tunga White: Now the movie, [indistinct 00:30:54]?

Earnestine Atkins: Beaufort.

Tunga White: Where was the theater located?

Earnestine Atkins: Oh, Bay Street. But it's not there anymore. It's turned into a shop now.

Tunga White: So it was segregated, obviously. There was a different entrance for Blacks?

Earnestine Atkins: I think before my time. I think before my time it was segregated. It was one entrance, one side for Whites and one for Black, but I'm not quite sure of that. 'Cause I never really went to the movies a lot. I may have gone maybe twice a year.

Tunga White: Dances were school related, or—

Earnestine Atkins: No, just community.

Tunga White: Did school carry on any things, social activities?

Earnestine Atkins: At the schools. At the schools. Not a lot. Uh-huh.

Tunga White: Now, the community dances, where would they be at?

Earnestine Atkins: Right there. Right at Soul Palace, and right at the [indistinct 00:31:58] Packing House.

Tunga White: This was a gathering place for all different aspects of people.

Earnestine Atkins: Exactly.

Tunga White: And you said church. What church did you go to?

Earnestine Atkins: Ebenezer Baptist Church.

Tunga White: Now, was your family about [indistinct 00:32:19].

Earnestine Atkins: All of my family stemmed right from there.

Tunga White: Did they hold any positions in the church, family members?

Earnestine Atkins: No. My father wasn't a deacon. My mother was a missionary.

Tunga White: Y'all kids [indistinct 00:32:42] in church Sundays?

Earnestine Atkins: No, no, no, no, no. It wasn't that restrictive. No, no. Well, let's back up a little bit. Before I became a member of the church, before we became a member of the church, I think like three or four of my sisters and brother all joined at the same time, and we went in on that first thing they called, I believe. I believe, I think that's—I believe in God or something like that. That was a new trend going through. But during before my time, during my sister time, they had to go out in the wilderness and pray.

Earnestine Atkins: They had to go out in the wilderness, they had to wear something white. They had to tie their head. They had to go in the wilderness, like in the nighttime. They had to pray. They had to seek for a teacher. And when they dream or seek for a teacher, if they dream of someone in the community, most times someone who was older, they would have to go to that person, says, "I had a dream and I want you to be my guardian teacher, or my spiritual person to talk with."

Earnestine Atkins: And that person would identify with that party, and that party would have to be able to work with that person for a week or for two weeks. And she would have to go out every night, and if she believe in God or something like that, when she's out at night underneath the tree or in the wilderness, if she

was a true spirit, a true Christian or something to that effect, she would not be afraid in the dark, or something like that. And that test, part of her testimony, she would have to testify that she was not afraid of ghosts or whatever that we fear that may be in the woods. Someone else can tell you about the wilderness, 'cause they can tell you specifically how that—It was one of the most unique experience for people who had to go through that, who knows about the wilderness prayer.

Earnestine Atkins: And they'll have to come back and tell certain things that they have seen or they'll dream of. It was some kind of ritual or something that they would have to follow in doing that, but it was so sacred that it was just different from what I came through. But I'm saying all of that to say that before us going to the church, because we didn't live far from the church and we didn't have rides and stuff to get to church, we had to go to a praise house. That's really where we learned our godly things, the Bible, hymns, spirituals, Bible verses.

Earnestine Atkins: All those things came from the praise house. During that time, because churches were distance and we could not walk, each community had prayer houses, and each community had their own deacon, leader, and something else. To be our leaders, let's put it that way. They would make sure that all the community people would every Sunday or Tuesday and Thursday night, would go to that praise house. It's a little house that everybody goes and just worship.

Tunga White: Everyone in that particular community living around there.

Earnestine Atkins: Right. Right. Everyone had a praise house and everyone, all the praise house met on Tuesdays and Thursdays and Sundays. So if on in my community, which is Eustis, if you met on Tuesday night from 6:00 to 8:00 or from 7:00 to 9:00, that mean everybody else in those communities would meet the same time. So they had the kind of same time to meet, but different places to meet. This is where I got all of my Christian background in terms of how to raise a hymn, how to sing spirituals, my Lord's Prayer, how to come up and testify, how to learn prayers. This is where I got all of my teaching, in the praise house. Since then, then [indistinct 00:37:32] will transform into a churches.

Tunga White: Now how much difference was the worship service at the praises house from the church and was it set up sort of like a church?

Earnestine Atkins: Okay, praise house was more individualized. Individualized mean that everybody that came to that service had something to do. It was a teaching situation. The deacons, the leaders, and the ward, whatever, they used to have us come. The children used to sit. They used to put us in position to read the scripture from the Bible. They would call up the young one from the back and say, "Come up, child, I want you to—" Oh they would tell you, "Open your Bible to such and such a page." And then they would read that for us and we would read down with them and they would show us, "Look in chapter—Matthew fifth chapter." They would show you how the chapter was and the verses. This is how we learned chapters and verses.

Tunga White: Was this more spontaneous, or you knew that when you came—

Earnestine Atkins: No, we knew things would be done, but they don't tell us when you come, "Tonight, this is what I want you to do." They call you on the spot, and they did that for a reason, to train you. And when you go up there and if you didn't know what to do, you mess up. Then they pull you through that process. You know what I'm saying? They help you along. If you bum fumble and you act like you don't know what you're doing, and most times we didn't know, this was our teaching.

Earnestine Atkins: They would say, "I want you to go up, Earnestine, and I want you to get the Bible and I want you to read such and such." And before then, I didn't know that you could find a chapter and then find the verses. But they teach you. They find the book in the Bible, then they show you the chapter, then they find it for and they show you, say, "I want you to read this. See, this is chapter five. I want you to read from number one to number four." And that's when we could read them. They would let you read.

Earnestine Atkins: Then to raise a hymn, that's the short meter and common meter. You probably don't know nothing about none of those kind of things [indistinct 00:39:43]. But I mean, here we know about these things. And they would, both of them is sung in a different way. One is long, one is short. And before you leave here, you need to go to go to a prayer house service.

Tunga White: Now, is it where you take a song and you just—Did you lengthen?

Earnestine Atkins: Lengthens, add on, and that's part of it, yes.

Tunga White: Yeah, I know some of our, in our beginning of our prayer service, we have that. We do songs like that, then regular.

Earnestine Atkins: What's that?

Tunga White: [indistinct 00:40:06].

Earnestine Atkins: Little one?

Tunga White: Uh-huh.

Earnestine Atkins: The red shirt?

Tunga White: No, with the [indistinct 00:40:19].

Earnestine Atkins: Oh, okay. Little one? Young fellow? Boy.

Tunga White: Now when you looking back at that, which one did you like?

Earnestine Atkins: I liked the praise house better.

Tunga White: Now. Okay, now when you were in that situation, you were a young person, which one did you like?

Earnestine Atkins: Praise house better.

Tunga White: Praise house [indistinct 00:40:41].

Earnestine Atkins: Because in the church, we don't get to do that. It's just recently, in the recent years, the youth or the young people, and I'm in the adult, I would go along with the adult. But it's just now, I mean, the recent past train over the last five, ten years is that they're getting youth involved in doing those kinds of things. Then, it's not done like how we learned it. I mean, it's done on a lower key. On a lower scale. You don't get all the teachings in the church as you would in a praise house, because these people will let you do it over and over until you really get it. And then they'll tell you now, if you did it tonight, they'll tell you, "Now when you come back Tuesday night, I want you to be ready to do something else."

Earnestine Atkins: And they'll do it over and over and next week, two more people or four more people would doing that. And sometime, they may assign you to make sure. So you can go home and look that up in the Bible and come back to do it, so you'll save time. But see, that was teaching to us. If this interesting, I want you to go home and take Luke the fifth chapter, and I want you to read down to the tenth verse. Then when I come back, I need to know that this is what I'm going to do Sunday or Thursday. Also, along with that, I also need to know why shouldn't I then confide in one of my leader or someone on the ward who knows about the Bible, to teach me those words, to teach me those verses in the Bible so when I read it, I can go back and I can explain it and that's how. And see, we don't do that in the church. Even up until today, we don't do that in church.

Tunga White: Around what age did they start incorporating the children?

Earnestine Atkins: The children, when we were young, we were young, I would say like 10 and 11. We used to go and listen and we used to look at our bigger sisters and brothers do it. But as we got bigger, during that time, we would've been in the process of learning how. You see what I'm saying? Although it was nine and ten during those time, we would watch them do it and at some point they would even ask the young ones, "When you're chilling back there, lead us in a song." And one of us may say, "Well, Jesus love me. Yes, I know." Then everybody say amen. And we would just do the songs ourselves. So it would kind of help us get rid of a lot of fears that we may have because no particular one can do it, but anyone who does it, and if anyone mess up, then another person would catch on you and carry on.

Earnestine Atkins: If I didn't know all the words, then when they see me kind of stumbling, then someone would pick that up and take it on, then I would sing along and sing along and sing along. And if you do it over and over at each service or something, then it become a part of you over a month, two or three months, and you just become you. Then you start doing it. And they would pull us from the back and they'll say, "Come sit up front and I want you to do this tonight." And they'll tell us, "You all are young children, we

getting older and we going to have to teach y'all do this thing, because when we're gone, you all need to know." So that was our teaching. Then people, the leaders used to come to the houses and say, "You need to be in church tomorrow. You need to be to the praise house tomorrow night or you need to come as slothful members." That's what they call them, the slothful people. That's what they call them.

Tunga White: Now, who was some of the leaders you had at the praise house [indistinct 00:44:16]?

Earnestine Atkins: The leaders, all of my leaders, all of my leaders now are deceased. But our biggest leader was Mr. Marion Gardner. And he was one of the men who was in that four day storm who lost his whole family but one granddaughter.

Tunga White: Oh my goodness.

Earnestine Atkins: He lost his wife, he lost two or three children, and he saved his granddaughter. He held onto a tree somehow. He just held onto a tree, and just kind of held onto that tree and he just survived. Oh, is [indistinct 00:44:52], I mean some people can tell you some stories. You hear me? If you be along, they can tell you some stories.

Tunga White: I want to try to talk to them too. Now, where exactly was the praise house [indistinct 00:45:02]?

Earnestine Atkins: The praise house right across from Jerome, the praise house. Jerome is on this side of the road. The praise house is on the opposite side of the road. The little bushes back there.

Tunga White: Now, you said you had services Tuesday, services Sunday. And what, it was like night you would [indistinct 00:45:24]?

Earnestine Atkins: Evenings. Evenings. Usually try to get so everyone get back home right at dark or right after dark, like dusk, 9:00, 8:30, 9:00 at the evening.

Tunga White: Now when did the praise house [indistinct 00:45:41]?

Earnestine Atkins: Gosh, the praise house dance, and I hated that too. I joined church in '59 [indistinct 00:45:55], and right about in the early '60s, the praise house kind of start dwindling.

Tunga White: And that was due to the people getting cars and more churches popping up?

Earnestine Atkins: Cars. Mm-hmm.

Tunga White: What other changes did you notice in your community that are going have occurred now in the last 10, 20 years that, when you were growing up, things were different. Like you mentioned there were praise houses, and then people started going to church. What other changes have you noticed?

Earnestine Atkins: One big change is that people are just not community oriented like they used to be. People used to plant their farms or their fields, and people used to share. If I pick a bushel, if my daddy got a bushel of okras, he would go around to everybody's house and share. If they kill a hog, the whole community would come and get a piece. And that's not just my family, it's any family.