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History 473  
Immigrant Oral Experience Interview Annotated Transcript

I had the pleasure of interviewing Olive, an Air Force wife and mother who immigrated to the United States from Port Antonio, Jamaica. Born in 1933, Olive moved to several places around the world and now has six children, six grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren. I am her granddaughter. The themes that we focused during the interview were: Early Childhood, Jamaican Culture, Racial Identity, Military Life and the Civil Rights Movement. Olive has a unique story in many ways. She was an interracial Jamaican who married an African-American military officer. In the early 1970s, Olive become mildly involved in the Civil Rights movement after meeting Rosa Parks. Throughout this interview you will read about the experience of an extraordinary Jamaican immigrant who became a world traveler and a living source of history.

AMBER FERGUSON: Okay hi, hi grandma.

OLIVE MAY: Hi Ambie

AMBER: Um today is April 14, 2014. We are in my house, Amber Ferguson, in Greenbelt, Maryland and I'm just gonna talk to you and get your life story a bit. So um how's your day going?

OLIVE: Oh very good, I'm so happy to be here with you today.  
[0:32]

AMBER: Okay so my first question is um: So what were your fondest memories about your childhood in Jamaica?  
[0:39]

OLIVE: Well I remember my whole family would march every night, we would march around the house. And it was not exactly circular veranda, but the veranda stretches all the way around the house. And we would march in order of size or age. And um my father was very strict about that. We would be marching and keep your shoulders up and everything like that. He was like a drill sergeant and then I remember too we used to go to our uncle's house maybe twice a month and he used to live in this great big plantation house.¹ And um you had to go across in this swinging bridge because the river was under the bridge. And if it rained the swinging bridge would get washed out sometimes but they would fix it right away.

AMBER: Why did you march? Why did you march around the house?

[1:59]  
OLIVE: You know he wanted us to get exercise.

¹ The use of the word “plantation house” refers to a Southern colonial style of architecture.
AMBER: oh (laughs)

OLIVE: You know because he was a soldier in World War I.\textsuperscript{2}

AMBER: Oh he was?

OLIVE: mhhmm

AMBER: Do you know what he did?

OLIVE: Not exactly I don’t know. But I know he had a high rank but I’m not sure what he did. But he went to England in World War I and he had a good posture and he believed in exercising so we had to do that every night and my mom would fuss a little but she would still do it and then we went to our uncle’s house, that’s one of my fond memories, going to my uncle’s house. And some of the rooms they didn’t even use them in the house b/c it was so big. And it was kind of dark, we were so scared sometimes in the house. That was the only brother he really associated with, that’s one of my fond memories.

[3:19]
AMBER: So growing up um I know you would talk about the different things you were in in school, so how were like the schools in Jamaica?

[3:28]
OLIVE: Well it was under the British system and they had classes, you started school three or four years old. And the elementary school there were two branches that you could go. You could go to high school after you reached 15 or even before, but the elementary school ended at 15 years old. And then those people could go ahead to become teacher, there was a special school for teachers or they could take commercial exams like shorting and typing stuff and become secretaries. Or work in the bank. You didn’t have to go the high school b/c a lot of people became civil servants and so, leaving school at 15 and pursue other things.\textsuperscript{3}

\textsuperscript{2} The majority of Jamaican born men who served in World War I were between the ages of 19 and 25. Their occupations consisted lawyers, doctors, engineers, farmers, carpenters, clerks, blacksmiths, shoemakers, tailors, mason, printers, builders, coachmen. An estimated 500 men from Jamaica served in the British military during the war.
Source: F. Cundall, Jamaica's Part in the Great War, 1915-1918. London: IOJ, by the West India Commission, 1925.

\textsuperscript{3} Jamaica’s education system is based on the British model. The education system comprises a variety of public and private education programs that are taught in English. Up until 1970, only about 20–35 percent of children obtained any level of secondary schooling as their highest level of education in the Commonwealth Caribbean. However, by 2001 it was estimated that around 80% of the population had received at least some secondary education.
AMBER: Do you feel like there was more of an emphasis of going out there and getting employment versus do like doing school?

[4:38]
OLIVE: Yes mmmm. They had a big emphasis on education.

AMBER: Like professional education?

[4:50]
OLIVE: Yes and it was under the British system.

AMBER: What types of careers did women mostly have? You said secretaries?

[5:02]
OLIVE: Yes and you could do in civil service too and nursing. Nursing was and teaching.

AMBER: What did you want to be?

OLIVE: I wanted to be a teacher.

AMBER: mmmm
[5:21]
OLIVE: Yes and I made little rag dolls and I used to teach them and I remember one it looked kind of odd and I put that one in punishment and my dad told me if your going to be a teacher you have to treat every kid the same. And I learned that lesson but the doll seemed odd and umm.

AMBER: What kind of things were you in in school? Like what type of activities?

[6:01]
OLIVE: Oh I was a Girl Guide, which was Girl Scouts, the British called it Girl Guides. And every activity after school I joined and I played basketball, which we called net ball. And um Literary and Social Club, and I just joined everything. Everything there was to join but mostly it was Girl Scouts that was my priority, extracurricular.

AMBER: What did you do in Girl Scouts?

[6:42]
OLIVE: Oh we went tracking, we set tracks all through the. We would go camping and once the SS Bull came, the British ship and we went on there but you had to have some badges in order to

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4 In 1915, Jamaica’s first Guide company was formed in Spanish Town, Saint Catherine. In 1967, the Girl Guides Association of Jamaica was registered as a non-profit company limited by guarantee. The program focuses on the eight points of giving service, keeping fit, enjoying the outdoors, family life education, nutrition, exploring the arts, thinking for yourself and decision making. Source: "Jamaica." World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts. Web. 13 May 2014.
AMBER: How long did you do that for?

[7:33]

OLIVE: All through high school, four years and um but I never did get my swimming badge. I don’t know why, I never did get that badge and we would go to the poor house. They would call it the poor house and take stuff for the people. And some of the children coming to school they’d walk miles to get to school. And we had an hour and a half for lunch and we would come home for lunch and sometimes the country children they didn’t have any lunch or anything and I would always take somebody home for lunch because a lot of them didn’t wear any shoes but...

AMBER: So I know that church was a really big part of year life

OLIVE: Yes

AMBER: Could you talk a little bit about your religion and just the role that church played in your early life?

[9:04]
OLIVE: Well we went to Anglican church, which referred to as English Catholic. But we didn’t have confession and we had to go every Sunday. You went to church even if you were sick, you had to be in church and then we had Sunday school, in the Sunday afternoon, there was Sunday school. And I remember when I got confirmed and it was the first time I was going to wear long stockings you know. And my legs were so skinny on my way to the church my stockings kept falling down. Anyway and you wore garter belts, we didn’t have pantyhose at the time. You had to use garter belt and my dad he didn’t go to church that often only once in a while but my mother always she never missed church at all. And on Good Friday we had to go to church at 12 (a.m.) till 3 (p.m.) and you couldn’t eat anything on Good Friday. And when we got home from church we had bun and cheese and maybe a hot drink or cold drink or whatever. But no cooking on Good Friday. And during lent we had mostly fish and on Sundays we had chicken and once in a while we had meat. But on Fridays, especially no meat or anything, just fish.

AMBER: Did you always give up stuff for lent?

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5 Jamaicans are “ardent churchgoers” and they are affiliated with many religions and sects. There are more than one hundred Christian religions practiced in the country. The island is predominately Protestant (61 percent) with a small percentage of Roman Catholics (4.1 percent). According to several texts I read and hearing stories from my other family members, church attendance serves many functions in the lives of Jamaicans. Status can be raised by attending churches where prominent community members are found. Activities such as community fairs, cricket matches, dinners, teas and harvest festivities were and are still common church events.
OLIVE: Oh yes we always did.

AMBER: Do you remember anything?

OLIVE: Sweets and yes. Mostly the minister would tell you to do something extra that you’re not used to doing. You know get out of your comfort zone and do something special. And like I said we would go to the Arns house, or they called it poor house, and you know take food and clothing and stuff for the people. Let me see if I can think of anything else.

AMBER: How big was your church?

[12:04]
OLIVE: Oh it was big. It was a big church.

AMBER: Was it close to your home?

OLIVE: Yes, close. Well not by American standards. But in Jamaica everything is close. You know like we walked everywhere, only if you had to go to the hospital or anything you might take a taxi or maybe to the railroad station. But we walked everywhere, sometimes miles. We would go camping we would go miles.

AMBER: Okay, um you want to say anything else about religion or church?

[13:06]
OLIVE: Only that I should’ve kept up more going to church now. Because I don’t go as often as I should and ah that’s not good and that’s one thing I regret. But um I didn’t follow up with that and didn’t take the children to church as often as I should have.

AMBER: Um so what was you relationship, I’m just curious to know, what was your relationship like with your parents, your siblings? Like what was your dad’s name and your mom’s name?

[13:52]
OLIVE: Well um you want the last name too?

AMBER: It’s fine, it doesn’t matter.

[13:59]
OLIVE: Well my mother’s name was Priscilla, Priscilla Loretta and my father was Abraham Dunbar.6

OLIVE: Give pappie a loan and we had to sell the house for I think it was 200 pounds, acres and acres of land. And moved, pappie7 got a job with the—well he already was an overseer and he

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6 This was the most uncomfortable part of the interview when I asked her about her parents. Two minutes of the interview was edited out in the final version.
got this job at Boundbrook and we lived there for a while. We lived there for a while and then my father got sick.

AMBER: Do you know how long they were married?

[17:15]
OLIVE: Um

AMBER: Was he older?

19:20]
OLIVE: He was fifteen years older than my mom. (laughs). But I had a very good relationship with my parents, very good. And everybody spoiled me.

AMBER: Because you were the youngest?

OLIVE: Yes. And I was little and skinny. So but um that solidness didn’t take effect on me. It didn’t bother me, I didn’t think I was special or anything like that, more than the other kids, you know. But everyone spoiled me. My mother was the disciplinarian. She would render her spankings, everything like that. But my father, he didn’t believe in spanking kids because one time this man was really not spanking but he was beating his little boy, the little boy was about five and my father went there and took the strap from him. And the man was drunk and then he came the next day and apologized. Well anyway I got along really good with my siblings. Of course we had little tiffs now and then, nothing physical?

AMBER: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

[19:08]
OLIVE: I had four sisters and one brother.

AMBER: Were you equally close to all of them?

[19:16]
OLIVE: Yes but my brother he was like a father role you know. He was 12 years older than I am so you had more respect for him than you had for a regular brother. And um well Emma she was seven years older than me too. You were tight to respect the older kids. Like if mammie and pappie went out, you listed to the older kids. I always had to listen because I was the youngest but um it wasn’t any conflict and so. We didn’t have that type of life. Everybody loved each other and so and when the hard times came we stuck together.

AMBER: What did they teach you? To handwrite? Did they teach you anything?

[20:26]
OLIVE: Yes I know one Christmas I didn’t get new outfit for Christmas and all my friends, Christmas was the day you went to the matinee after in the afternoon and all my friends they got

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7 Throughout the interview pappie is referred to as Olive’s father and mammie refers to her mother.
new shoes, new dress, new everything. And I came for me to go to matinee and I say “I’m not going.” And mammie said, “Yes you are going, even if you wear that dress from sometime ago” and by the time my eyes were red from crying. And she said wash your face, you’ve going. And I went and I had a good time, that’s the lesson she taught me. And then my dad he always tried to resolve conflicts by talking to you he didn’t believe in punishment so he always tried to settle things by talking to you. And something else about the school they had corporal punishment, you know physical punishment. And they used these long canes, supple was about the thickness of my finger and their pliable. They used that it was normal, it was the norm if you misbehaved and didn’t do your homework or anything like that. You got whipped they called it.

AMBER: I have a question about that, did people usually get married younger?
[22:42]
OLIVE: No, usually older but like um my mom and dad was a special circumstance.

AMBER: No, no not them but the people in Jamaica in general?

[22:58]
OLIVE: No, if you see somebody getting married at a young age a girl you kind of assume their pregnant or so. Usually you have long engagements. How am I doing?

AMBER: You’re doing great grandma. You know when you talked about Aunt Inid, didn’t she have red hair?

[22:39]
OLIVE: Yes, yes when she was growing up her hair was red and it seemed as if she had a little temper. And her hair would seem redder when she was angrier and she would jump up and down and scream?

AMBER: How old are you’ll apart?

[24:04]
OLIVE: Four years apart. And Buriel was two years older than I. And um I was closer to Hussient. So all the nieces and everybody because she didn’t judge you. But Inid was good to me because she would stay home from school. She used to put her hand down her throat so she would throw up and act like she was sick, so she could sty home and curl my hair and play with me. That time she was about six and I was like 2. And one morning my mom caught her and um that’s how they found out she was making herself sick. And Aunt Hussient, I remember I was always sickly. I had malaria, whooping cough, I had everything you could think of of childhood sicknesses and Hussient would teach me while I was sick and couldn’t go to school. And when I got to school I was way ahead, I was ahead of the other kids because she had taught me. And Buriel, well Buriel was a loner and she was very thrifty, like in the nights when we would put our money together to buy ice cream and popsicles and all that. Sometimes we would get one popsicle and eat it. And she always didn’t contribute. She said she didn’t want any popsicle but when we got the popsicle we gave her some. And that carried over to later life. When she got sick she had enough money to go to the doctors and stuff, she was never frivolous about money. And she was serious about her profession. She was a registered nurse. And when the other nurses
would go on strike she would not go on strike. She stayed there and took care of the patients. She was good about that. And my brother he was just in a class by himself. I had a doll once and the arm came off and I thought the doll was destroyed for good. And by the time in a blink of an eye he had the doll fixed and he just put the—and I thought he was the greatest. I thought he was the greatest person in this world when he fixed that doll. And whenever he came home at night I remember he would bring Vienna sausage. We didn’t have Vienna sausage all the time you know because everything was cooked by scratch. And we had Vienna sausage and crackers at night and we would get up and snack. We had two cousins, when mammie’s sister died she left two boys and they were in the same position, their mother was in the same position as my mom. After she died their father put them in boarding school, he took care of them but you know they weren’t accepted in the family. So they lived with us for a while and they used to visit a lot when they got grown. I remember one worked for the railroad company, Norman, and he brought his bicycle on the train when he came to visit and when he saw me walking to school every day he left it, he left the bicycle and gave it to me. Yeah that was nice. And when I was going up to the school in a bicycle and passing everyone along the way. And they would say, “Where did you get this bicycle?” It saved me a lot of time and stuff and the other one Aubrey, he’s still in Jamaica. The other one, Norman, he went to England. Aubrey he’s still there. He’s like a brother.

AMBER: So you grew up in Port Antonio? So would you consider that a small town?

[29:58]
OLIVE: Yes we seldom traveled to the big cities.

AMBER: So you didn’t like go to Kingston that often?

[30:10]
OLIVE: No, I only went to Kingston when the circus came (laughs) and we went there and when my mom got sick. When my mom got sick I went to stay with her because I was little at the time and I missed her so much.

AMBER: What kind of sick?

OLIVE: She had a bad back she fell once. And she had to get, they call it heat treatment in Kingston and I went there and stayed with her for about four weeks I stayed with her. And when I went to get my passport and the circus like I told you. Those were the only times I went to Kingston.

AMBER: Did you go to any other cities? How close were you to the beach?

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8 Port Antonio is located 60 miles northwest of Kingston. In the 1930s it was a tourist destination for celebrities because of its secluded beaches.

9 Jamaica is divided into 3 counties and 14 parishes. Around half of Jamaica’s population live in rural areas and 1 million people live in the capital and major commercial center of Kingston, which situated on the southeast coast.
Source: Middlehurst, pg. 5.
[31:11]
OLIVE: We had the beach right in Port Antonio.

AMBER: Oh wow.

OLIVE: So um we went to beach often. One Christmas we spent to the beach. And we didn’t go to Kingston that often but because we lived in different places but it wasn’t big cities where we lived. And my father was an overseer, on it was banana or sugar cane, sugar cane plantations (estates). You can put estates instead of plantations, it sounds better.¹⁰

AMBER: No, it was a different context. It’s okay.

OLIVE: And we moved and they didn’t have any schools. So once they boarded us out but that didn’t work out too well and then we had a tutor once and the other times my father just lived on the estate himself and we stayed in Port Antonio and then he would come home on weekends and sometimes I would go and visit him.

AMBER: So you said your father was an overseer and that’s how they made money?

[32:58]
OLIVE: Yes.

AMBER: Did your mom stay at home?

OLIVE: Yes, and another thing, my mom would always bring in girls from the country. And they would call them “school girls” and they would live with us, they would work with us, and she would send them to school but they were more or less domestics. But they lived with us and they went to school. And we always had helpers they used to call them in the old days “servants” but now they call them helpers. My momma was treated them because sometimes she got into fuss with them, quarrels and stuff if they don’t act right. Most of the time the helpers were good. But when I look back on those days, it’s so different now.

AMBER: You said you used to make your own clothes and stuff?

OLIVE: Yes we would go to the dressmaker. But like at school we have home economics class and you would start a dress or so the beginning f the semester, but we only had a hour for home economics. And you would be doing other things. We had one teacher she took use to her house to wash her clothes. And we did different things in home economics. I have my book, my home economics books, yes.

AMBER: Teenagers didn’t really work? Like you know they have after-school jobs.

[35:32]

¹⁰ This was an interesting part during the interview. Plantations and estates are interchangeable words to mean farms, not to be confused with slave plantations.
OLIVE: No, not really. Not while going to school. Maybe now they do but in my time they didn’t because there was so many adults who needed jobs you know even if they worked it would be as an apprentice. Like our dressmaker she always had girls there learning to sew but they weren’t paid.

AMBER: Like an internship?

OLIVE: Yes, I guess if you’re talking about paid, they would have to pay her to teach them maybe. Like on summer holidays she would have the young girls there to teach them how to sew. You had to go two or three fittings before your dress was finished.

AMBER: You mentioned that people were born at home.

OLIVE: Yes.

AMBER: So you had a lot of midwives?\(^\text{11}\)

[36:55]
OLIVE: Yes, I knew of two in the town at the time but I guess if you hadn’t made arrangements before you could go to the hospital and have your baby because medical was free in Jamaica. They have the private hospital where you pay but there’s nothing like you go to the hospital and turn you away that didn’t exist.

AMBER: Why did most, so most women chose a midwife.

OLIVE: Yes, mnhmm. But in some occasions where you have to have cesarean you had to go to hospital.

AMBER: That wasn’t common though, was it?

[37:53]
OLIVE: No because a lot of people who you think should have cesarean, have the baby normally. Because I hardly ever heard of any cesareans. If you want the ambulance to come for you, you had to lay in the street. You can’t just call an ambulance. Well maybe you could, I don’t know. If it’s an accident or so I guess, but normally the poor people when they want an ambulance, they would just lay in the street and the ambulance would come.\(^\text{12}\)

AMBER: I never heard of that.

OLIVE: Yes and they had the pauper road and you would see people gather out there Friday evenings and get the stipend, I don’t know what you call it. But get money once a month and

\(^{11}\) Midwives were trained women who assisted in the delivery of babies at home.

\(^{12}\) Public health care in Jamaica is free to all citizens and legal residents at government hospitals and clinics. This includes prescription drugs. "One of the drawbacks to free health care is long lines with no appointments accepted by the physicians."

they get food too. And they call it to pauper roll. And we didn’t get allowances. When you going to meetings and so, like Girl Scout meetings, you get money to pay your dues and so. Or if you’re going to the movies, you just get the movie fare, we didn’t have snacks at the movies. But we were happy you know. We didn’t have all the luxuries that kids have now but we were happy. One time we were going to another school, the guys were going to play football, which is soccer and we went in the back of a truck. They just put the seats in the back of the truck. And we were happy. We had a tarp and if it starts raining, we just put the tarp over you. I guess we didn’t know any better. But when we went to Kingston one time to sing on the radio, because we had won the chorus for the schools in Portland and we went to sing on Radio Jamaica\textsuperscript{13} and we went in a bus. That was a rare occasion, to have a bus. And although we weren’t rich, but my father made a good living and everyone thought we were rich just because of they color of the skin. You know they automatically thought we were rich, but we weren’t rich. My mom she was very thrifty too.

AMBER: Is that why you coupon?\textsuperscript{14}

OLIVE: Yes (laughs). And she could, people going around selling chickens, live chickens, she could hold that chicken in her hand and tell you how much that weigh and calculate what it cost. And she was a very kind person, she would give you the shirt off her back but don’t try to cheat her and they would have their own scale. And she would bring out her own scale and weigh that chicken and you would get just what that chicken cost. You would get no more, no less. One time aunt Inid, this woman came by selling grapes or plums, plums. And aunt Inid said we don’t want any today, but next week you can bring some and the woman came the next week with about a hundred plums and mammie had to pay her for them because she said she could’ve gotten sale along the way but she brought them specially. And we had forgotten all about the plums.

AMBER: Was there a lot of stray animals, like cats?

[43:38]

OLIVE: Yes.

AMBER: Did you have any?

OLIVE: Oh yes. I had the mother cat’s name was Patricia and she had Luna and Stella and they afterwards had kids too and their father’s name was Mr. Conchie. And when the mother cat died, I don’t remember what age, but we got the Bible and told my father to bless over it. And my mother said that’s the last for me and wouldn’t have any part of it. Yes, we always had cats and dogs. Aunt Buriel and I, we liked the cats and aunt Inid, she liked the dogs.

AMBER: I know that you were a military wife. So just a little bit, so people would know, you met my grandpa.


\textsuperscript{14} I coupon too. I think it’s a generational trait.
OLIVE: Yes.

AMBER: And then what happened? You got married?

[45:20]

OLIVE: Yes. We went to Austria, got stationed in Austria?

AMBER: You got married in a courthouse?

OLIVE: No in a church.

AMBER: Oh what did you wear tell me, how did you plan it? Tell me.

OLIVE: I don’t know if I have any pictures. All the pictures are still in Jamaica. We got married in Jamaica and he came to the states, well his mother was American so he had no problems getting to the states and he joined to Air Force and went oversees and then I came to the states, came to Washington and stayed with his family. Their Jamaicans, at least the husband was Jamaican. So I didn’t have any problem. It wasn’t much of a culture shock with the food and all that. But the climate was a big shock for me. The day I came the sun was shining and it was freezing. Well anyway my husband got stationed in Austria and I lived there for six months. I got pregnant with Delvin and I went to New York and had the baby in New York. Then we got transferred to Nebraska and Jay was born in Nebraska. And from there we went to Detroit and your mom was born in Detroit and then Quill was born in Detroit. Then we went to Jamaica and things didn’t work out too well. I got divorced and left the kids with my mom so I could try to establish something for them. Then years later I brought them up and married your second grandpa and uncle Fred was born in Detroit and then we got stationed, he was in the Air Force too, and got transferred to Germany. He went before and they put up the Berlin wall and I couldn’t go when I wanted to so when they lift after that when everything was resolved with the Berlin wall, I went to Germany and Dave was born in Germany. Then we came back to California and from CA we came to MD, Andrews.\footnote{During this section Olive referred to notes she brought with her to the interview.}

AMBER: Air Force base?

OLIVE: mhm. And after that we got transferred to Turkey, the kids came up to the states, and we went to Turkey and from Turkey oh gosh where did we go. We went to, I can’t remember now

AMBER: Oh it’s fine. How did you meet my grandpa, your husband now?

[49:43]

OLIVE: In Jamaica, we lived in the same town.

AMBER: No no no my grandpa, now

[49:50]
OLIVE: Oh, well he lived nearby. Someone introduced us. And after I got the divorce and came back, I met him and started talking and one thing led to another and we got married.

AMBER: Did you get married in a church?

OLIVE: No.

AMBER: How did you get married?

[50:25]
OLIVE: We went to the minister's house and got married there.

AMBER: Okay, what was your favorite place to live?

[50:48]
OLIVE: Well I've enjoyed this area but I didn't like California that much. There was a lot of prejudice there that I experienced because once we went to this house, this office, they had vacancy signs out there, and the woman told us there weren't any vacancies. And we know there were vacancies.

AMBER: Was she a white woman?

OLIVE: mmmm. But we found a nice place

AMBER: Was this in the 50s? 60s?

OLIVE: In the late 50s. Or early 60s, early 60s because Fred and Dave were born then. But I liked Italy and even Turkey though there were a lot of rules. You had to be careful. Like in Turkey if you had a set of China, and one piece break you better keep those pieces because everything you take in the country, you had to take out because they don't like you doing any black market and things like that. So there were strict rules and you had to respect their culture and stuff, which is normal, but they had extreme in their rules, some of their rules.

AMBER: What was it like living on a military base? Where did you used to work?

[53:08]
OLIVE: Well I had many jobs. I worked at the BX.

AMBER: Base Exchange?16

OLIVE: Yes, and in that time I worked for AT&T17, I worked for BlueCross, all this was wile I was a military wife and then a couple times I worked on the base at the BX like I told you.

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AMBER: Did you like living on a base or off base?

[53:47]
OLIVE: Oh I liked living on a base. We lived on a base in Massachusetts and Illinois we lived on a base. But a lot of times we lived off base. I never lived on Andrews because we had bought a house outside. But in Illinois and Massachusetts we lived on base, it was good. You know you felt safe. You didn’t have to worry about the kids. But uncle Del one time when we first moved to Massachusetts and the kids they had a curfew and he was always late for his curfew and the police stopped him. He told them he was new and couldn’t find the house. He thought of some good excuse. When we first got to the base he met some guy who told him his uncle was the manager of the commissary. And one day I needed Delvin for something and he was gone. And I looked up in the phonebook the name of the guy at the commissary and I called his house and sure enough Delvin was there. And u to this day Delvin can’t figure how I figured it out. And uncle Fred he got lost one time coming from football practice and it got dark and I couldn’t see. He was about 12 years old, 11 or 12. And this guy brought him home. He just took a wrong turn from football practice. And Fred was so scared.

AMBER: Where were you’ll living then?

OLIVE: That was, I think that was MA too. A lot of stuff happened in MA. I worked in the seven day store on the base in MA.

AMBER: Did you like working?

[57:06]
OLIVE: Yes, it’s always nice to get a paycheck.\(^{18}\)

AMBER: So, the next question, I’m just curious to know, and you don’t have to answer this, but what do you consider your ethnicity to be?\(^{19}\)

OLIVE: Okay my father was Caucasian.

AMBER: English?

[58:06]
OLIVE: Yes. And then my mother was descended from the maroon\(^{20}\), you know they were from slaves, but she didn’t have a dark complexion.

\(^{17}\) AT&T was formerly known as the Bell Telephone Company.

\(^{18}\) I noticed Olive smiling as she talked about earning a paycheck.

\(^{19}\) I was nervous to ask this question.

\(^{20}\) When the English expelled the Spaniards from Jamaica in 1660 the English did not want the mountain region. This area of Jamaica was given to former slaves, called maroons.

OLIVE: Yes, well she was mixed but she never did like to talk about it. Like remember when I told you about her beginnings, she told me that about two years before she died. All that time I didn’t know any details.

OLIVE: Did she consider herself Jamaican?

OLIVE: Yes, but when I’m filing out any forms or anything and they ask for race, right now I put Afro-American or black. Or if they have other, I put other. Because I don’t know what else to put. I can’t go through the process of telling them my father was Caucasian you know so I just leave it at that. My kids are Afro-American, there should be Afro-Jamaican. (laughs). You know but you think you have enough?

AMBER: I just want to talk about Jamaican food that you cook and then we can be done.

OLIVE: Well like I told you when I first came to the states the people lived with were Jamaican. So they used to get the Jamaican newspaper, we listened to the Calypso^{21} on the radio, and they would cook, at that time you didn’t have as many Jamaican stores as we do now, but with the curry and the other other spices, if you couldn’t use goat meat, you used regular beef and for fish, we tried to cook the fish the way they cook it in Jamaica. Somehow the fish doesn’t taste the same way. I don’t know if it’s the Caribbean waters but it had a different taste in Jamaica. But no matter how good of a cook you are, that fish doesn’t taste the same way to me anyway. And we always tried to cook everything in Jamaica, the rice and beans, curry goat, and well you can get oxtail^{22}, curry—chicken. Substitute spices that you couldn’t get.

AMBER: Were you the only one of your siblings to move to the states?

[61:36] OLIVE: Yes.

AMBER: And you were the youngest?

OLIVE: mhmm.

AMBER: Do you ever think about how it would’ve been if you stayed?

[61:46] OLIVE: Yes. I think about it but I try to go home especially in the early years. I tried to go home every year, sometimes I went twice.

AMBER: Do you ever send stuff back?

^{21} Calypso music is an Afro-Caribbean genre of music.
^{22} Oxtail is a signature Jamaican dish. It is cooked with dry buttered beans and is usually served with white rice.
OLIVE: Oh yes, always.

AMBER: Like what?

OLIVE: Shoes and dresses and stuff.

AMBER: Is stuff more expensive there?

OLIVE: Yes and sometimes they couldn’t get the stuff, expensive. And everybody, even if they could get it, wanted it from America, they could tell the difference. “I got his from America.” It was always nice, even when I was growing up, to get something from America. You treasure it more.

AMBER: I remember mom told me you sent her back skates, like roller skates.

OLIVE: And whenever I’m going I would get a long list from the preacher, the doctor, whoever. They would ask mammie, “Is Cherry coming this year?” And mammie say yes and they would give her a long list. One year I packed stuff to go and the day I go I realized there was nothing in those bags for myself. No clothes, nothing. And it happens all the time you know, and one year I almost didn’t go because I didn’t get everything that they ask for. It got ridiculous after while. Because I didn’t mind taking stuff but everybody would send me long lists, I have some of them still. I might be able to put my hand on it right away but I got a lot of stuff. And I always try to take especially for my mother, anything she wants, she’ll get. And my sisters.

AMBER: So my last question, and I’m curious, you knew Rosa Parks right?

OLIVE: mmmmm.

AMBER: A lot of people didn’t know her so could you just talk about that?

[64:33]
OLIVE: Yes um she was very humble. Because one time we went to this meeting we had and Coleman Young he became the Mayor of Detroit after I met him and it was a rainy Sunday afternoon. It was raining and thundering and this guy that discovered Watergate he was there and they were trying to help him because I don’t remember exactly why he was there but anyway we had this meeting. And Rosa Parks23 got up and introduced me. It was my turn to introduce her you know because she was the star. I remember I had on these white sandals and she said those sandals are nice but I would prefer them black and I remember I went out and got her the white sandals.

AMBER: The black sandals?

[65:54]

23 Rosa Parks was a civil rights leader who famously became the symbol of the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955 when she refused to give up her seat on the bus to a white male rider.
OLIVE: No, I got her the white they didn’t have any black and she was so happy. And every Sunday we had, when Nikki Giovanni came to town she was there, and we would dress up every Sunday, well she didn’t dress, she was normal. And we’d go down somewhere in Detroit and meet the woman who founded [former black] magazine, that was a black magazine and she came to town. They asked her why she had brought this white guy, they thought it was a black magazine. And she said, this white guy helped me on this magazine. I couldn’t get help from any black person. I think it was Anchor magazine, I’m not sure. But Rosa was there for every cause.

AMBER: Was this in the 1970s?

OLIVE: Yes. And all that time I didn’t even think of getting her autograph. She was such a normal person. And how I met her uncle Quill had a teacher who taught black history during their lunch period, the kids would take their lunch. And I went to the BX and I found these flash cards of all these famous black people and I gave it to Quill to take to class. And Ms. Cadewell wrote me a note and said you made my day and she started an adult class at nice and I went to that and she was good friends with Rosa. So that’s how I met her.

AMBER: An adult class about black history?

OLIVE: mhhmm. Yes and we would recite little poems by Langston Hughes. You know Langston Hughes wrote this poem, I’m neither black nor white.

AMBER: Did Rosa ever talk about what happened to her?

[68:59]

OLIVE: mhhh yes she always told me about how she would go to the back of the house. She said I was tired coming home, I was tired and I wasn’t about to go to the back of the bus. And I met her mother too. Her mother was sick, she lived in downtown Detroit. And when we went to see her mother the bed was immaculate, white crispy sheets and the mother hair was combed. Her mother had long hair and her mother was in the bed and she died a little after we saw her. And her husband died before I met her. He was a civil rights leader too.24

AMBER: Did she have a lot of friends or was she a quiet person?

[70:21]

OLIVE: She was quiet, she no nonsense when it came to civil rights and stuff like that. Because I remember one time I invited her to bingo on the base and she said she didn’t go to anything frivolous. She was all action for civil rights. But she was nice.

AMBER: Did she ever meet Quill?

OLIVE: Yes, she went to A&T one time when Quill was there and I got a letter from her that said, “I met your handsome son.” And I don’t know where that letter is. And Quill had called me too and told me he went up to her and said my mother met you with Ms. Cadewell. And both

24 I was surprised at how close my mother got to Rosa Parks for her to learn about her personal family life.
couldn’t wait, Ms. Cadewell called me and Rosa wrote to me. Yes, Quill said he saw she went to visit the school and he said he went up to her. But I try to check out her library.

AMBER: She seemed really down to earth. Did you live close to you?

[72:23]
OLIVE: No, because we lived on the base in Selfridge\textsuperscript{25} in Michigan and she lived downtown Detroit.

AMBER: Did you see each other often or regularly?

OLIVE: No not really just some Sundays when Ms. Cadewell was going somewhere but I didn’t especially go down to see her. Only if I went with Ms. Cadewell.

AMBER: Did you ever talk about your personal stuff, like your family?

OLIVE: Yes a little, but not too much. I closer to Ms. Cadewell than I was to Rosa.

AMBER: Do you miss them

OLIVE: mhhmm yes.

AMBER: Well thank you so much grandma for doing this. Is there anything else you want to say about Jamaica or your life in general? Oh one last question, did you want your kids to go into the military since you had a few.

OLIVE: Well I didn’t mind, I just worried about wars. You know like when your mom went to Saudi, I couldn’t sleep at night, I look at those missiles. I was happy she came back in one piece. And Quill he’s been through some things in the military but most of his was hush, still don’t know a lot of stuff. When is this due?

AMBER: I present next Thursday. Do you have anything else to say? Thank you, you have a really great story.

OLIVE: Thank you.

\textsuperscript{25} Selfridge, Michigan is located in Macomb County.