

Peaches Lacey



I came here when I was 10 years old. I had come from Chicago.

I had not really been used to seeing as many non-people of color 'til I came here actually. I had never been on a farm. It was actually an apple orchard in Verona. Very pretty, you know, but strange.

I went to Franklin school that was on Lakeside. And then when Lincoln opened up as a middle school I went to Lincoln. And then when I went to high school I went to Central. My mother graduated from there too, in 1938.

When I first came here they couldn't pronounce my name. It was really different because all my teachers at the time in Chicago were either black or Puerto Rican. So that's all you knew. My principals were black.

Had to really come up to Beld Street, then you got to Beld Street, then a lot of African Americans like on Baird and Fisher and Taft. Those were basically where a lot of the African Americans lived.

The South Madison Neighborhood Center was the height of all of our growin' up. Which is now the Boys and Girls Club. We just basically grew up here. The center was basically our focus. This was where we came to teen night on Friday nights, and had our little record spins. This was where we had sleep overs, pajama parties, things like that.

In fact my mom could have got me to do almost anything just as long as they didn't take Teen Night away from me. I think I really could of stood havin' a whuppin' as long as I could come to the center on teen night.

Typical teen night. Sometimes we would have a talent night. Some of the teens and kids from the neighborhood would put on a little show. They'd sing and dance to music or whatever. We first started out we had a juke box here.

I think there became less and less African-American students coming to the university or being recruited. As the years went on, there seemed to be a separation between the community and the university. The community didn't include the university as much, or the university didn't include the community as much with the togetherness like it had been.

Things just don't happen like they used to. I've noticed in the last 8 or 10 years that the people in certain forms of leadership, it seems like they have to wade through so much stuff in order to help people. It's like they have a lot to lose now. And because of that they have to really weigh when somebody brings some kind of issue to them. If they are gonna put themselves out there to help the people or not. To help people sometimes may be restricting or may come from the fact that they been burned a couple a times, and you get burned enough you learn that that's the fire and you don't want any part of it.

I don't know where this tunnel vision comes from. There used to be a time when people would pick up on anybody who wanted to serve. Now, it's like, do you have enough education? Or should we listen to what that person says? Or I saw this person in a compromising place, so I don't know if I want them to do something else over here. That to me is really a difficult situation.

Harvey Scales and the Seven Sounds used to come here on a real regular basis...used to play down on campus all the time, out of Milwaukee.

So if "Baby Love" by the Supremes was number one, it was hard for them not to play that here because it was number one. It still wasn't a thing where you could hear them all the time. To this day it's still not. Which is one of the reasons why it's so good that we have WORT-FM here. Because it gives us a chance to kind of let people know what may be going on with the different music.

And then of course, Madison did things a little later than anybody else. It could have been played two years ahead in Chicago, and then it came here two years later.

Etta James, she wasn't as popular as the Supremes. But she got some really beautiful music. She went through a lotta struggles. The things that women would get involved in, when you start comin' into a male-dominated industry like the entertainment industry. Barbara Acklin did some beautiful stuff, and people don't even know who she is. Billboard didn't start tracking R & B music until '64 or '65, so there's no record before then. Only the collectors would have this actual music.

A lot of the early artists, they just wanted to sing. They didn't know anything about the business itself, and a lot of things were lost in respect to rights, copyrights and stuff like that.

There was a song done by a new artist, LL Cool J or someone like that, who said don't bring up Little Richard because he will die and he will still be broke.

We always have to go a little bit further than the next person. And that's really kinda' hard sometimes, 'cause you can only fight for so long before you get tired.

There's been a lot of different agencies that have socials, fairs, programing, and all of us dibbin' and dabbin' for the same amount of money really started putting the cramp on people's initiatives to do things. But the block party was just too fun. You'd plan all year for it, and then one day you see it come together. It's good to see stuff come together.

I think there is definitely a gap between the haves and the have nots. I could say 10 years ago, maybe 12, I could still consider myself in the middle class. But I'm definitely not there now. A lot of people that had just one job before are now working a job and a half.

They're not gonna put that in the papers. It's kind of contradictory because mainstream world says that you should be doing things as honest as possible and all that kind of thing. But they're not really giving the real story about stuff. We can put up a new maximum security prison. That makes absolutely no sense to me. Nobody can tell me that they can see better (need) for a prison than they can see giving more money for a more comfortable wage for people who are working in nursing homes and hospitals and home health care.

You've got one percent that's making a lot of the rules and policies and procedures. And they wouldn't know what it would be like to make less than what they are making. It's just not logical to me, if somebody has to go through these changes and work two or three part-time jobs just because they cannot make ends meet. And we're talking about people that don't have any debt really.

Just because I can't afford to have someplace really expensive doesn't mean I won't take care of a place and try to be productive in the community. Madison is a big town with big degrees. If you're just not way up there and you're single, you're gonna be strugglin'. And it really shouldn't have to be like that. People should at least be able to have a decent place to stay. ■