

Divine Boyd

Mr. Anders

Period 2

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Life Through the Eyes of an Elder



I interviewed Bernice Morehead, the oldest child of 6, a mother of 6, and a grandma to all. She is 87 years old and born in Oxford, Mississippi in 1935. She has done basically everything in the books from volunteer to social work.

Divine: so first for our interview I think that we should start with the introduction so my name's divine I'm a student at Lincoln high school and I'm interviewing my grandma

Grandma: I'm Bernice Morehead and divines great grandmother, divine I thank you for this opportunity

Divine: Of course, grandma, so I wanted to take the chance to interview you because our project is about Giving a voice to those whose voices aren't usually heard so

Grandma: wow

**She says feeling honored to be picked for such an important topic*

Divine: yeah, I feel like um I chose you because you are really important to the entire family, you're a symbol to the entire family and you just mean so much

Grandma: thank you

Divine: not just to the family but also to the community like everyone who knows you calls you grandma so it's like a big family

Grandma: oh thank you divine, thank you for your recognition and I do think that I am called to serve people including my family first and then community and the people who do not have a voice, that would be the poor people, homeless people, the people who can't speak, people who are not in the right place and so I think it's my responsibility to be the voice for the people who don't have a voice whether it's in politics, in church or even in a family setting and sometimes when we gather together we don't allow the little and younger people to speak, I am that voice to make sure everyone is included I believe in inclusion.

Ever since I can remember my grandma has always been the one to bring people together. It's never fake with her, she's always genuine and has the kindest heart out of everyone I know.

Divine: ok, um also can you state your age

Grandma: *gasps I am 87 years old

Divine: and where you were born

Grandma: I was born in Oxford Mississippi in the country where I was a sharecropper

Divine: *laughs out of nervousness (this was my first ever realistic interview where I was finding out information on someone or something that was so important to me)

Grandma: *laughs along with me to make me feel comfortable

Divine: first question um is what was it like growing up in the south during the time of segregation, oh! also state when you were born sorry (Knowing my grandma was born during this time I knew her experience growing up was going to be way more different compared to mine)

Grandma: oh ok I was born in 1935, what it was like during that time was we were separated and there were laws different laws and certain rules for black or African American people than there was for white people we were not privileged they were privileged however not everyone was mean and nasty that was white we had people who made sure we were taken care of who shared their wealth with us and so but we knew what some of the rules were as they related to schools housing, even walking down the street there were rules if you met a white person you got off the sidewalk and allowed them to pass and so my mother made sure we knew the rules for safety it was a survival to know the rules and obey the rules.

Divine: ok (at this point during the interview I'm more of taking in information and trying to process compared to asking a bunch of follow-up questions like I do later in the interview.

Grandma: yea

Divine: um (still laughing nervously to fill the silence) so, when you were little, you said you were a sharecropper?

Grandma: yes

Divine: um so like what were some of the jobs you did, like you said you lived on a farm?

Grandma: I lived on a farm

Divine: ok

Grandma: I had to feed the animals. I was the oldest of six children, so I had a lot of responsibility and then we planted and picked cotton we had to share. "sharecroppers" so that meant that whatever you raised you kept some of it and had to share with whoever owned the farm. (Now that I look back on my grandmas answer I should've asked her what work conditions were like, what it was like to pick the cotton, how long she was outside working for and how old she was when she was doing this)

Divine: ok, so you had to pick the cotton, did you guys have or use a cotton gin on the farm?

Grandma: No, we had to take it to the cotton gin, the gin would take the seeds out and process the cotton and they would keep some of it, the same thing with the corn meal we picked the corn we took it to the mill and the mill would keep 1/4th and give us the rest back and so

Divine: (understanding but saddened nod)

Grandma: and so, people didn't have a lot of money or didn't really need money we exchanged services most of the time

Divine: sorry my mom just walked in

Grandma: that's ok she's invited

Divine: yea she's invited

(We chuckle in unison)

Grandma: she's special she also lends a voice for those who can't speak for themselves

Divine: especially since she's a social worker

Grandma: yea we love her

(Nods agrees and moves on because we will get sidetracked)

Divine: So, at what age did you and your family move to Washington? Or what age did you move to Washington?

Grandma: I was, well first we left Mississippi and we went to Iowa I was 17 yea and then in 1969 I don't remember how old I was

*We laugh together but I believe for different reasons

Grandma: I don't feel like adding all those numbers

Divine: yea (as I agreed) no you don't have to, you don't have to

Grandma: so, then we moved to Washington, yes

Divine: okay, did you and all your siblings move to Washington

Grandma: No just me and my husband and my children

Divine: how many children did you have?

Grandma: Six, yea and one grandchild, you know Anthony

Divine: yea

*We both laugh

Grandma: so, we moved here in 1969

Divine: ok, when you went to college what did you study?

Grandma: well first I got married so I didn't go to college immediately

Divine: ok

Grandma: But I always wanted to learn. My mother taught us before we went to school how to read so I was always looking for books on psychology, social work, geography, and I would read those books then after I had all my children I went back to school and got my first degree in interior design and then we moved here and I started working for the state then I got my next degree at evergreen and then when I was 65 I went back to school and got my master's in business administration

*This is where I start to get into the second part of my interview, and I ask more questions and or ask more deeper thinking questions

Divine: so why did you decide to get your master's degree in business?

Grandma: I chose business because I want to run my own business number 1 and number 2, I was in the business of leadership with the state, and I wanted to increase my ability to market myself because I was retiring from the state, and I wanted to look at other jobs and so it was to validate what I had already knew of prior to this.

Divine: what made you choose to do social work and or work with the state

Grandma: well my degree like I said was in interior design but there were no jobs open and I met up with an organization to do some work and they referred me to the state and that was the beginning 1971 was the beginning of my career with the state and so I started out as a coordinator then a

supervisor then administrator then program manager and just when on and I was offered several jobs and I just kept taking jobs until I got to the top and that's how I got into the state and that's how my career started as coordinator of the home maker program and it was a program who helped mothers who were on public assistance and at that time we had public assistance as well as child welfare and those were all together and so we tried to provide holistic services to the family including taking care of mom in case she had to go to the hospital I would have workers go in and stay in the home to make sure children were not displaced.

Displaced: cause (someone or something) to move from its proper or usual place.

Divine: um do you have any regrets or for anything that you've done

Grandma: I'm going to say no because I don't like living in that area I move from there so that's what I tell people I have done somethings I wish I had not done but I don't live there anymore So what I've learned is to learn from your mistakes make sure you don't repeat them and then what would you do different what did you learn from it and most all in all of my experiences I learned something from it even if I learned not to do it again and so yeah I don't linger with regrets I just say wow that was me that was then and now I've learned from that and I'm moving on

Divine: mhmm (I believe this advice my grandma gave to me was the most impactful because I like to hold on to things and it's hard for me to let go of them, so I'm going to try my best to implement this in my daily routine)

Grandma: do you have any regrets, Divine? Oh, I'm not supposed to interview

Divine: No, you can ask me questions

(As we laugh together struggling to get the words out)

Divine: Um I try not to live, like you said I try not to live with that either I do hold on to stuff so it takes me time to move past it but eventually I do, and I grow from my mistakes, and I learn from them so

Grandma: that's amazing divine you're very wise and I like that

Divine: I get it from you

Grandma: oh, I'd thought you get it from your mom but anyway I'll take it

Divine: she gets it from you, and I get it from her

Grandma: Oh, we hand it down

Divine: yeah exactly

Grandma: sometimes it take some of us longer to process but what's important is to move on and one of the things I say when I'm working with people because I was certified life coach also I say look at your gratitude what are you grateful for and if you take a list and list all the things you're grateful for on one side and the things that that's bothering you list on the side that have what your grateful for should outshine that other list and So what are we grateful and look at our gratitude and so I'm grateful to be able to speak with you and to see you have grown, I remember when you were born divine and to see you have grown a young lady who's sitting across from me interviewing me and so I'm really proud of you

Divine: I think I've always wanted to interview you grandma because your life just it intrigues me, you're so wise and you've basically done almost everything, and I think that you're really good at everything that you do

Grandma: thank you thank you

Divine: you're well-rounded

Mom: you want grandma on your team

Divine: yeah

(We all chuckle)

Mom: even though and I don't know if you said how old your grandma is it's it is a blessing to have an 87-year-old grandma still alive right and so it is really good I'm taking this 87-year-old on my team I don't care how old she is

Grandma: So, if we if we playing football what position am I, am I the quarterback?

Mom, and divine: yes, you're the quarterback

(Transitioning laugh)

Divine: um what is one decision or actually you could name a couple what are a couple of decisions you made that have shaped or changed your life in a big way

Grandma: one decision was to go back to school the other decision almost bring tears of joy to my eyes is to take my 3 grandchildren and not allow them to go into the system of child welfare even though I work for the child welfare system I knew, no one had to tell me that children are better off with blood. and we may not have been the best as far as material things but we were the best to have them connected to stay connected to their family know who their family is and to love and to protect and so we know so that's probably one of the reasons and I think I recognized that or realized that once they became grown and started telling me that I did a good job

Divine: yeah

Grandma: One thing I do regret and I ask your mom I said what could I have done better she said you never asked me how I felt and so that was something that we didn't grow up with so that's one of my regrets but I learn from it and I pass it on to other people I said ask your child how they feel about that and I use that because I learned that from your mom

Divine: and now she does it for me

Grandma: yes, yeah, it's a really good thing and I share this story with everyone I share with people that I'm not perfect I made some mistakes and raising my own children, but God gave me a second chance when he gave me the grandkids because I knew not to do what I did with them yeah yeah

Divine: So, uh I have a few questions about 4040 and how it's such a big symbol in the family what year you purchased your house

Grandma: in 1975

Divine: and can you give some back story as to what 4040 is

Grandma: 4040 is House of love would I say 4040 has been a place for safe place for a lot of people we didn't call it that and when we moved here and moved into that house we brought other people relatives from Iowa who live with us we had other people in our related live with us at 4040 there was some really good times at 4040 or some sad times 4040 and we always made room and one year we had a family reunion a big celebration yes and we slept well this year was long time ago and we slept 30 people at 4040 then one year when you were on the dance contest we had a big celebration and there were eighty people in the backyard and what I like about 4040 is when you walk in most people when they walk and they feel love when they walk in we always have big meals cooked every weekend we don't do it anymore but we used to have meals cooking everybody could come by and get something to eat so that's 4040 I think that but I love about 4040, 4040 is her house address yeah but I love that 4040 is it's like it's like a second home and like you were saying it's very welcoming and like it's like you feel good when you go there and you feel happy and this makes you happy

Grandma: what does she think about 40

Divine: what do you think mom

Mom: what do I think I think the same thing what you both said I it means so much to me because that's where I grew up that's where I was raised and I always feel I always know like divine said it's an it's a first home for me but it's a second home for me because I have my own address now that I'm an adult but I know that at 4040 I can always go over there and get what I need it's a grocery store, it's a

church, it's a bank it's a place to rest your hand on it's a place where you do feel loved and welcomed and able to just embrace and be able to feel a sense of family and a sense of belonging

Grandma: wow oh thank you

Divine: all because of you grandma

Grandma: she's wise

Divine: I know, she gets it from you don't tell I said that

Grandma: oh, I won't tell her

Divine: what is one piece of advice you would give to someone who's struggling in deciding what they want to do with their life?

Grandma: I would tell them to process it to think about it, to pray about it and to get advice from someone who will just listen and give you some options but not push them on you and like I would say divine have you thought about this have you thought about the result of this, if you say you want to go to work at McDonald's I would say divine do you feel that that's a career that's going to get you what you want well I don't know what your material needs are so perhaps not and I would say sometime we don't get what we want immediately it's a process and we have to sometimes work for it working means studying, getting good grades and going to school in order to get a good job because no one else or someone else may not give you the resources you need to buy your car by your house you have to look to yourself and so I would also say look inside of you and ask your question I believe also that if you really want something whatever it is if you concentrate on it you can get it not me praying for it writing it down repeating it and owning it so I want this and this is what I to do to get it you can't just say I want to sit down you have to keep moving right because

Mom: "without works is dead" is

Grandma: that's what the bible says now

(Mom and grandma laugh in unison)

Divine: for my last question one piece of advice, you would give someone from my generation

Grandma: oh wow

Mom: you're a millennial? right

Divine: No gen z

Mom: she's a gen z

Grandma: I don't understand all that, but I know what age she is, what age is in that group

Divine: it's from 2000 to

Grandma: OK my advice would be to allow me to listen to you and my advice would be please consider some of the things I want to share with you and listen to what I have to say and I will listen to you before I make some final decisions or judgement about it I may say what bothers you how does that feel what triggers you what do I do that that gets you upset what can I do to help you if I say you have to do this how do you feel about it so that's what I would do and what I try to do with people your age and what all ages but especially is to listen because I don't understand what you guys going through I don't get it I don't understand it walk around with headphones on I had to call you four times before I can get your attention so I have to learn some sign language and be able to communicate and then I have to always be willing to allow you to ask me questions and that way we can come together I think people your age should say well grandma how you feel when I do that and I should be able to say it should be a give and take it should be able to say divine how do you feel when I say that what makes you angry what makes you happy what makes you glad and you tell me what make you happy and I can say well you know I can't participate in that one but if I can I need to be honest with you whether or not I can ok

Mom: so, don't totally dismiss each other yeah

Divine: like a mutual understanding

Grandma: yeah, yeah so divine let me ask you a question, what am I Carlita?

Mom you're a boomer, no?

Divine: yea I think she is, or she might be a baby boomer

Mom: industrial? Yeah, are you industrial yeah

Grandma: I think so because things were being revolutionized and yeah picking cotton and yeah, all that stuff so how do you feel hanging around industrial people that era and what is your understanding

Divine I like hanging out with you grandma if that's what if that's what you mean I like you because you give good advice, I feel like it's good to hear from a different perspective

Mom: yours is called the silent generation

Grandma: oh, what we didn't speak up yeah and that itself determine who we were and how we communicated yeah, we didn't speak up

Divine: and I like to hang out with you grandma because and not only do I get a different perspective but just the way like that we think is different and I like hearing like all the way you think and express yourself

Grandma: what's your mom

Mom: I'm gen X yeah

Grandma: oh so you know what I like about generation X is because of the bridge and I learned from generation X because I'm listening and I think wow and so with gen z I'm trying to get to wow I want to be open enough to say wow and that is that is to expand my understanding and to be able to listen without judgment so that's what my goal is in life is to listen without judgment

Mom: that's good (she says understandingly)

Divine: Thank you for letting me interview you grandma I love you

Grandma: I love you so much I feel important

Divine: you are important

My grandma influences me to want to make a change and or help people just like she did that is why I plan on majoring in social work when I get to college, I believe I could really help people especially the people in my generation not just physically but also emotionally and I can be the bridge between generations and people

