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Bridges that Carried Us Over Project

Interview Summary

Interviewees:

Willie Moses with Eleanor Moses

Interviewers:

Hailey McKenzie and Jennifer Tilton

Interview Date:

May 11, 2021

Interview Location:

Perris, CA

Interview Summary completed by:

Jennifer Tilton

Description:

Willie Moses discusses her move from Louisiana to work in war industries in Seattle, and then her move to Los Angeles, where she and her husband built a series of businesses. She became a real estate agent in Compton, and then moved to Perris, CA for her health in 1957 where she continued to work in real estate with Art Townsend. She discusses early life in the Good Hope and Meade Valleys near Perris, where many Black families bought land and settled in the late 50s and 60s. She shares her memories of March Airforce Base, stories of Art Townsend and Clarence Muse and the political work they did for civil rights, as well as the ways the community organized to bring water, gas and sidewalk services to this rural county region. She talks about racism young people faced in the schools, their effort to bring Black history classes to the schools and her work with the PTA and Human relations commission which ran encounter groups in the late 60s and 70s. She shares her work as a union leader when she ran the school cafeterias, and the collaborations she built across political and racial lines working with the county supervisors and creating the community center named after her and Mr. Schaffer.

Keywords:

- Perris school district

- Perris High School
- Racism in schools
- Black history class in schools
- Human Relations Commission
- Real estate agents
- Good Hope Valley
- Wagonwheel development
- Clarence Muse
- Art Townsend
- Political organizing
- Farmerville Louisiana
- Changes in racism

Temporal Coverage:

- 1940s - 1980s

Key Events:

- Civil Rights Movement

Key Organizations:

- Perris PTA
- Municipal Advisory Council
- Human Relations Commission
- Bethel A.M.E. Church
- Precinct Reporter

Spatial Coverage:

Name of Site (if relevant)	General Location/Address
Bethel AME Church Good Hope	24480 Sophie St, Perris, CA 92570
Meade Valley	Riverside County

Good Hope Valley	Riverside County
Clarence Muse Ranch	N/A

Interview Index:

Media Format	Time (hh:mm:ss)	Topic Discussed
Digital Video	00:06:41.000	Discusses involvement with the PTA in Perris
Digital Video	00:20:08.000	Discusses what brought her into real estate
Digital Video	00:37:12.000	Talks about her efforts to bring water and gas to the city of Perris
Digital Video	00:44:19.000	Discusses experiences of racism in Perris
Digital Video	00:56:08.000	Recalls other Black business owners in Perris
Digital Video	00:49:39.000	Discusses work for the Human Relations Commission

Full interview transcript can be found below.

Interview Transcript

Start of Interview:

[00:00:00]

00:00:04.000

Hailey McKenzie: All right. My name is Hailey McKenzie and I'm here today on May 11, 2021 with Jennifer Tilton to interview Mrs. Willie Moses, for the Bridges that Carried Us Over Archive of Black History in the Inland Empire, to start us off can you spell your name for us.

Willie Moses: Spell -

Eleanor Moses: your name,

Willie Moses: Willie Lee Moses.

Hailey McKenzie or Jennifer Tilton: Thank you. So, to start us off can you tell us a bit about where you grew up in some of your early childhood memories?

00:00:41.000

Willie Moses: I was born in the deep south; north Louisiana, Farmerville Louisiana. I went from pre-kindergarten. In those days, they didn't have all the fancy classes and all like they have now and all like they have now. And I went from elementary, all the way through high school at the same school. I had a beautiful family background. And you had to pay to go to school, and it was, I had an older sister. So one of us had to go live with my grandmother because it was schools that you didn't have to pay. They were financed through someone associated with Sears Roebuck, I can't think of a name right now. And I went from elementary all the way through high school and graduated valedictorian. And then I had two years of all Black college in Gremlin Louisiana, which was about 30 miles from where I lived. And then the World War II came. And then I went to Washington State to get married, which is kind of unusual.

Eleanor Moses: You didn't get married first

Willie Moses: That I didn't get married first, I went to East Port Orchard Washington, and I worked. After I got married, I worked for ammunition depot right outside of Seattle and my husband worked at the Navy yard. And we worked there for about, almost three years, and then the war was over. And we took our savings and went back home to

Louisiana. And we lived in Los Angeles. And then we lived in Willowbrook which is between Los Angeles and Compton. And then later -

Eleanor Moses: You bought a house and developed a business.

Willie Moses: We, we bought a house, and some land, and built stores, two stores, a laundromat.

Eleanor Moses: Some other businesses.

Willie Moses: And then I had chronic sinus in the climate. The dampness was not good for my sinus, and a friend from my hometown, had been visiting Perris and told me about it and we came and shopped around till we found something that we felt that we wanted to buy. And we did. And we bought two and a half acres, and I was in real estate. And then we decided that we wanted a corner instead of inside lot so we were able to buy it. And that's where we live on five acres of land. And we built a duplex -

Eleanor Moses: where you move the house in from Riverside. You moved the house.

Willie Moses: And then we have a old time house that we moved from Riverside, California, which is twenty something, maybe 25 or 30 miles from where we are. And we bought the house. And it was so big that it had to be cut in half. And they moved one part and 10 days later they brought the other half. And my husband and the neighbors put it back together and and the family and the family. So, we've been living here now 63 years. We moved here in 1957. So we've been here quite a spell. And we is happy. We've been here so long, everybody in the county know you. (Laughing)

00:06:41.000

So then I've been active. When I first moved to California, Perris, moving from Los Angeles, I have been going to PTA with a hat and gloves. And one of the best friends I made she laughed at it later. She told me, I came in and sat down where was a vacant place. And I wasn't adapted to not being dressed. Everybody else had on tennis shoes and. Anyway, I made friends right quick.

And we were the first black family, maybe two or three, but it was very scarce. Yes. And when I, after I had been to the PTA meeting, one of the ladies said, "What would you say if we call and tell you we nominating you for president of the PTA? I said, "I wouldn't come," being new, you know. But anyway, it ended up and I became the first black PTA president in Perris, proper in the city.

I had four children. And we only had elementary and high school at the time and then as time went on the middle school came in. So at one time I was president of two PTAs elementary and junior high, and life moved on. And when the junior high opened, I had two teenagers that was old enough to be some of the first students in the junior high. And then they went on to high school. And that's where we got involved with black history. And I had a niece that lived in Los Angeles. And she was moving to Perris. And then I went and talked to the principal and vice principal, and the vice principal, whose name was Benson and he said, If my niece, who was 14 can maintain her grades and all, she could move into the class. And she read the poem, The Road Least Traveled, something to that nature, and it made a big hit. But during the time she was the two years she was, had been here, she made an outstanding speech on the road less traveled. I think that's the name of it, close to it if not.

And when the idea of bringing black history to the Perris High School my niece, Mary Beverly was her name, is her name. No, not now she's married. And I told she and my two daughters, Dr Yolanda Moses who's a professor at UCR and Gwendlyn. They were the three high school students. I told em you have to go to the principal and the vice principal and talk to them about bringing the black history class program to Perris High School. I taught you all I know, so now go for it. And that was what happened.

Jennifer Tilton: Can you tell us. So, do you know roughly when this was that they were working to get the black history course at Perris High School and did they succeed that they create a black history course.

00:12:46.000

Willie Moses: Yes, it was I don't know the exact year but it was in the 60s in the early 60s after we first - well we moved here and only had elementary and high school, like I said, and then when they grew up and became teenagers so in the span of five or six years. They were able to go and talk to the principal and vice principal, and they agreed to let them experiment and see what happened. And they did, they had a lot of history that my niece brought from Los Angeles because when I first came to Perris there was no black history. Anyone around and figured if we were gonna live here we had to do something to help improve it. So they talked to the principal and vice principal.

And at the time we had an older friend, a movie star Clarence Muse. And he wanted to help out and I told him, the young people are the ones that are doing the program. And if you want to participate, you have to, what they would allow you to do you can't come here and be in Hollywood. You have to be part of their program. And he was a very knowledgeable old man and had a lot of history himself that he could share with them. And they worked it out.

And then it was a black newspaper called the, Art Townsend was from San Bernardino the Precinct Reporter was the name of the paper and it's still going. And the sons are running a newspaper now, African American newspaper. So,

Eleanor Moses: and you, and you worked closely with him too.

Willie Moses: And I worked close with him because I had a real estate license. And he was a broker. And we did a lot of business and sold a lot of land in Perris, did okay.

Eleanor Moses: And he, he really coordinated a lot of the Civil Rights activity in the Inland Empire, Art Townsend was really a leader, Clarence Muse and my mother and Art Townsend and some of those folks were thinking actually more regionally, about the work, and really tied into the civil rights movement.

Jennifer Tilton: Can you tell us even a little bit more about Clarence Muse I mean he's somebody we've heard about, but what was he like and kind of, how did you come to know him?

00:16:39.000

Willie Moses: Well Perris was a small little place. He was out making friends and we were new, and you had to put him in his place because he was so knowledgeable and so eager, and we were just good friends. And we had a. We were told a movie was made here. Buck and the Preacher was made in Perris and he was in it. He was one of the first black lawyers. And he couldn't get a job as a black man so he went into movies.

Eleanor Moses: Yeah, he was a contemporary of Paul Robeson, he was friends with Paul Robeson. And we had made contact with someone that has written a book on Clarence and has done a lot of research, and we can put you in touch with her. But he was one of the first black actors to talk in, in talking movies and brought a lot of the technology there is a whole African American theatre scene and vaudeville and that and so he brought some of that to Hollywood and has a very rich history and so it's kind of fascinating that he settled out in the Perris valley with his wife Ina, and they lived in Good Hope off of Highway 74 they lived on a ranch, a kind of exotic little house with a couple horses and you know they lived meagerly, but with style and were really quite an influence on us growing up.

And I think one of the things that was unusual were some of the relationships that my mother had with these powerful men, and you know my dad didn't mind I mean they were buddies and so they we would sit and plot for hours on strategies of what to do in

the community. My parents would and my sister Johnnie and I would be in the background. This is Eleanor talking and you know they were just comrades in terms of strategizing about what needed to happen at the schools or elections and Mr Muse was really politically active around getting people out to vote. They were involved in political campaigns and he would go around election time with a bullhorn on his Chrysler election time with a bullhorn on his Chrysler, and all over the valley, remind people to vote. And those sorts of things so it's very hands on and they... He would bring musical groups to Perris for Black History Month. When I was in high school he helped us coordinate black history program. He would give black Leadership Awards to students and that sort of thing. So,

Hailey McKenzie: Can I ask about your career in real estate - How did you get into real estate. And what were there any struggles with being an African American woman in real estate.

00:20:08.000

Willie Moses: Well when I lived in Compton we bought a house from an Italian man, and he was getting a divorce and he needed cash money. And we were making a deal would buy and get extra land in the process. And he told me Miss Moses I met a lot of people buying, but I think you should get a real estate license. (Laughing) He said, because the questions you have put me through, You need to be in business. So I went to school in Watts and got a real estate license. So that's how I got in real estate. And here in Perris with the, Mr. Townsend the newspaper man was also a broker, he was Black, and

Eleanor Moses: And Bob O'Donnell, you started out with

Willie Moses: and then we met a Caucasian man. And we made good friends and he accepted us as family. When my daughter was in New York, and used to make nice moves, and he called me up and said, Yolanda is in the newspaper and that's one of my children, you know cuz we were like family. He's the nicest business man I ever met in my life. And I'm almost 100. So you know that's outstanding. And I lost track of him I don't know what happened to him I think he moved away or something. But we sold land in the space here called Wagonwheel. Here is 640 acres. And it was divided into land and that's where we live in the Wagonwheel part of the county of Riverside, through Perris. Our address is Perris. But the community name is Good Hope so.

Jennifer Tilton: And so you and Mr. O'Donald developed, helped to develop that land and sell that land where you live now.

00:23:05.000

Willie Moses: Yes, we saw that cut it up into acreage.

Eleanor Moses: And you didn't develop it though

Willie Moses: we didn't develop it.

Eleanor Moses: you worked with him.

Willie Moses: The people bought the land and build and move mobile homes, and

Eleanor Moses: There was a large black population that migrated out here and bought land if you want to talk about that.

00:23:30.000

Willie Moses: And that's when a large black population moved to Perris was during that time because you could buy property and pay on it by the month.

Jennifer Tilton; And that's the time. So, this was one of the areas in the in the region that didn't have racial restriction so it was an open community.

Willie Moses: Yes, anybody could buy. But now we have a lot of them. We are, everybody can come and buy it didn't make any difference then, So it's really developed. It used to be very few people but now it's over 50,000 people in Perris and

Eleanor Moses: And and my parents had friends that you know did day's work or worked for wealthy families or that and, or just people that have lived in the south, and were kind of cooped up in the city and would buy land and come out on the weekends and work in the city during the week and then commute out to Perris on the weekends.

Willie Moses: So we saw a lot of growth in Perris and it's still growing. So, we're not as fast, but.

Eleanor Moses: So some of the work that you did early on with like the Girl Scouts and Brownies. Girl Scouts and brownies and work that you did in the community. When you first start working in the community.

00:25:29.000

Willie Moses: Then I got involved with the schools, and then that made me involved in other things in the community. And that's how I got to know everybody in the county.

Eleanor Moses: What kinds of things. What kinds of things?

Willie Moses: I've worked with the different organizations with the county,

Eleanor Moses: like, and what kinds of organizations, what kinds of organizations, what organizations, what kinds of organizations.

Willie Moses: Oh the kinds of organizations

Eleanor Moses: Like MAC.

Willie Moses: Yeah. I served on the county in a lot of different places on committees and and all because with the school, it led out into other organizations. And that's how I got to be known in the county. And we have a County Center here in Good Hope, where another man and I used to work for the school district and when we retired we were working in the County Center. And it was named from Mr. Schaffer and myself.

Eleanor Moses: So it's the Moses, Riverside County Moses Schaffer Community Center, and you want to talk a little bit about working for the school district and being a woman leader and developing relationships and how this county.

00:27:37.000

Willie Moses: And when I was working for the elementary school district which I did for 25 years. I was the director of food services for 25 years for Perris School District. And I was also a member of the National School Food Service Organization. And through that organization we were able to get a grant and bring Riverside County cafeteria workers college classes. And we had a class of 24 with all of the women from all over the county of Riverside. And it was done through the funds from the National Food Service Organizations. And then we used to once a year we would go all over the United States to different national organization conference; We even went to Hawaii, where we had a delegation of eight thousand, you couldn't walk was so many, And I also was with the PTA and went to a lot of conventions all over California. Every once a year we had a Annual conference. And I was associated with that.

Jennifer Tilton; Can I ask a question, going back to - You talked a little bit earlier about coming to know and work with art Townsend, and kind of work regionally in early civil rights activism in the region. So I guess I'd love to hear a little bit more on how you came to know Art Townsend, and kind of what were the big memories you have of that

time in the 60s when a lot of organizing was happening throughout Riverside and San Bernardino.

00:30:26.000

Willie Moses: Well, Perris is small and he didn't live that far away. So everybody. He was from San Bernardino in at that time the Inland Empire the few blacks that were here kind of congregated, and work together doing things. And then he was a realtor, like I said, and I had a license and I worked with him. You know that's how I got to know him because he was a broker, and I was a salesperson. And I worked with him, sellin. We sold property in special places, where you pay down on and pay by the month and a lot of people were planning to retire and come to Perris. So they bought land. And that's how they did.

Eleanor Moses: What kinds of things did you work on with him? Like getting people to vote?

Willie Moses: And we worked a lot of voting and getting people registered and things like that. And he was a newspaper man, and he could advertise, and and like I said, the Inland Empire was... Perris, places in Riverside, small, but San Bernardino worked more with us. We called it the Inland Empire. And we did a lot of political stuff.

Eleanor Moses: Campaign offices, helping John Tunney. Remember John Tunney. Congressman Tunney Here, getting people out to support him.

Willie Moses: So we work together with San Bernardino, and other little towns where we could come together and do things because it was so few people at the time. And it was easy to get involved, if you were interested and that's how I met him. He was a broker and I was a salesperson. He had a newspaper, and I had a big mouth.

Eleanor Moses: So a lot of friends

Willie Moses: and a lot of friends, which I still have,

Eleanor Moses: they call you the mayor.

Willie Moses: They call me the mayor of Good Hope.

00:33:58.000 --> 00:34:14.000

Eleanor Moses: And that's how you developed your relationships with the county supervisors,

Willie Moses: And then worked with all the candidates supervisors, and all of their associates, that work with the supervisors. And that's how you get to know everybody is participating and working with them, anything constructive. That's going to make things better. We got gas, we got water. We, these are the kinds of things we worked with, and worked in. And that's how we got to be known. Then when we vote for something that we know that we need like water and gas we already had lights, but

Eleanor Moses: Yeah so when we moved to this area we were on a well, we didn't, you know we didn't have piped water, and we didn't have natural gas at that time.

Willie Moses: But we worked and got them

Jennifer Tilton: Is this, we've heard some other people talk about this CSA's you organized in the region is this part of the story of how you got water and gas do - Were you part of organizing one of the CSA maybe CSA 70 for the Good Hope or Meade Valley,

Willie Moses: Not Meade Valley.

Jennifer Tilton: No, but Good Hope

Eleanor Moses: CSA what's CSA stand for?

Jennifer Tilton: I don't remember exactly what it stands for

Eleanor Moses: It stands for county service area.

Jennifer Tilton: Yes, that's right, county service area. Yeah, yeah. Virnecia Green Jordan was telling us about the kind of the community efforts to organize these areas to advocate for resources.

Eleanor Moses: Yes, and the Wagon wheel was a part of that. The wagon wheel is. It's a special tax area where people pay into it, it's very odd out here in this area that they have sidewalks in a rural area to the school because people pay taxes into that - is that the CSA? Is that what it's called? She may not remember what it's called but I'm sure that's what they were working -

Jennifer Tilton: That's what it's called. Yeah, I think that's right.

00:36:25.000

Willie Moses: Yes, that was for the county.

Eleanor Moses: And you've been really involved in the MAC.

Willie Moses: Yeah, And that means with the county you have organizations, Good Hope had organizations to get gas and water, and any other things you need to make life better is done through the county.

Eleanor Moses: So the Municipal Advisory Council is what she's been involved with

00:37:12.000

Willie Moses: Each, each county, each little town, have their own organizations. When we were getting gas we had to work on that. And bring gas didn't have gas. First, didn't have water. You had to go to, they had water downtown Perris, and you could go haul water but we had a well. It was piped. We had piping and all. And we still have the well it's 80 feet, it has water in it. But we don't use that after we got Metropolitan Water and gas and water, lights were the only thing we had. And when we first got telephones. We had 9 parties on the line. And the old folks didn't think teenagers had any right to talk on the phone. And I said, But we pay a phone bill too. So they have a right. And they told me, we got a letter from your kids, Miss Moses. I said, Well, I didn't know about it, but I would have agreed with them, because they have a right to use the phone like anybody else, because we paying em.

Eleanor Moses: So why do you think that, you know, in the good hope in the Meade Valley area, why do you think it was a draw for so many black people to come to this area?

00:39:12.000

Willie Moses: The property was cheap. At the time, she wanted to know why so many black people came to Good Hope and Meade Valley is because the property was cheap, and you could buy, pay down on it, and pay on it. And people lived in the city. But they were gonna some day retire and move to Perris. A lot of people that bought land that way came later and built because they could afford it.

Jennifer Tilton: Can you tell us a little bit you know what that early community was like I mean what was the community like when you first moved out there What did it look like

and as it grew how would you describe kind of what it was like, way back then in the 50s
Yeah.

00:40:20.000

Willie Moses: Well, it will bare land well we bought into wagon wheel and Good Hope here. We um it was 640 acres and it was cut up into two and a half acre parcels, five acres. I don't know of anyone that bought 10. But as a lot of five acres and two and a half acres and no, not any higher than five acres in the wagon wheel.

Eleanor Moses: So did people socialize a lot or what was the community like?

Willie Moses: And we had different organizations and we would meet and discuss like with the gas and water, we had to have meetings to bring about the things that we needed to make it desirable.

Eleanor Moses: Who would lead those meetings: Who led those meetings?

Willie Moses: Different people that are interested, anybody that wanted to, if you had an organization anybody that wanted to be a member could be a member. And that's how we put things together.

Eleanor Moses: Was that the African American community or was that just in general?

Willie Moses: The general community, cause everybody could buy land. And if they wanted to see things grow and improve, then they have to participate.

Eleanor Moses: So, who were the African American leaders at the time?

00:42:21.000

Willie Moses: A few. Well people like you said Clarence Muse. When were voting for water and stuff. Whoever wanted to participate could. So then you join in and help make the community a better place by voting for improvements. And a lot of people had wells. Then when Metropolitan Water came then everybody, mostly, very few people were still using the pumps. But that was what they had. Wells with pumps on, and then you could pipe the water cause we did at first. But the well is covered now. But it still has water, probably not as much. So that's what made the community grow. And now it's 50,000 people. The last time, somebody was talking about Perris, including the county part of Perris. We live in the county of Riverside.

Hailey McKenzie; So you've said a couple of times that it was just a space for everybody. And can I ask if you ever experienced or witnessed racism in your community?

00:44:19.000

Willie Moses: Very much. It's everywhere.

Eleanor Moses: So talk about some of your experiences.

Willie Moses: When we first came to Perris they didn't want you to participate in in the school and things. When we first came my daughter wanted to be in the Drill Team. And she was an A student when she got here so all of the demands that was required. They told me she could be in the drill team, but they had a uniform. And when white kids went to high school, they passed them down to their friends. So I told them that if you tell me where you get the fabric we'll make it cause my neighbor could sew. "Well, we have the gold part, but the blue fabric we don't have." And they hadn't sold it in two years, they had the place where they were selling it. So I ended up going to May Company in Los Angeles to get the blue material to make the uniform. They were going to Palm Springs that Saturday in the neighborhood and I sewed all night. And Yolanda got to Palm Springs Saturday with a brand new uniform. Everybody was passed down for somebody's going to high school.

But, and then, that was where I had problems I ran into with an Indian lady who is part of the Pachanga. She's a person who is later found out is one of the natives for the Pachanga group.

Eleanor Moses: Native Americans. One of the Native American who... here at the school district.

Willie Moses: Her name was Needa Thompson. And she had she had gone to UC Riverside, she said earlier, and had prejudice in the school when she was going. So, at the school things that they didn't want people to do, and they had a swimming pool, they didn't want blacks to swim in it, had to be changed, and

Eleanor Moses: That was that Perris high school

Willie Moses: That was, the swimming pool was at Perris High School. But they didn't want blacks in the swimming pool.

Eleanor Moses: So they had a rule that says you couldn't go or they just were not kind.

Willie Moses: They were not nice when people went. They didn't want blacks in the swimming pool

Eleanor Moses: So do you want to talk about your work with the Human Relations Commission and how that was formed and what you did.

Jennifer Tilton: How did you make some of that change?

00:48:29.000 -

Willie Moses: Well, we have to use skill, plan and work on projects to make things better, because we are paying taxes and that was some of my dealings with some of the issues that I participated in is because we all have to live together. And so we have to make the rules, where they fit everybody. So that's what you have to do.

Eleanor Moses: So what did you do with the Human Relations Commission, what did you guys do? What was the work that you did? What did the Human Relations Commission do?

Willie Moses: Yeah we'll try to work in groups?

Eleanor Moses: When was it formed, where the money come from. When did that happen when you're when you're working when was that?

00:49:39.000

Willie Moses: It came from UC Riverside

Eleanor Moses: It was funded

Willie Moses: I think the money came for the project to start the Human Relations Committee.

Eleanor Moses: And that was for Perris Valley.

Willie Moses: For Perris Valley. So everybody who wanted to participate joined in.

Eleanor Moses: when was that

Willie Moses: during the school years you - in the 50s 70,

Eleanor Moses: like in the 60s or 70s? Do you remember 60s maybe 70s,

Willie Moses: it was probably in the 60s. Because we was here in 57. So, It was probably in the early 60s and middle 60s,

Eleanor Moses: I think it was maybe middle to later because I remember, they had. I remember when, when we were in, I was in junior high school so that was the late 60s. The Human Relations Commission had diversity work groups in the schools and so they pulled because it was a very diverse community. We had a lot of farm workers. I think there's a significant Asian population. I know we had Japanese friends that were in the area. But we had small groups I remember in junior high school which I think was pretty unusual. And I think one of the things that has remained in Perris Valley because it's a small rural area with a kind of a farming culture is that people tend to depend on each other and. As an example, I was encouraging my mom to talk a little bit more about her union work when she worked for the school district. She was the job steward for the classified employees and so the janitors and food service workers and the clerical and that sort of thing, which was a diverse group, and those folks would depend on each other and my dad died in the late 60s and those those janitors that my mom worked with came over and you know we've got five acres and they helped keep the house up and we raised pigs and, you know, they would come and do repairs and, you know, have that sense of community from that that that union relationship was an important piece.

And so the the Riverside County, Moses Shaffer Community Center is named after my mom and John Schaffer who, You know was a conservative white man very religious. But they had been union partners, and they took over and helped run that center when the county didn't have money, and they ran it in retirement for almost 15 years, they would rent it out and you know send the money to the county to county didn't have staff to run it and do the upkeep and that sort of thing and were instrumental actually in helping get the money for it because part of that community center is a fire station, which we didn't have fire services out here so they were instrumental in helping to get that center built. And then when there wasn't money for staff help to run it but those relationships are something that I think it's very unique about this area is that even though you have folks that have different political ideologies, they're still able to work together and going into the beauty shop in Perris is an example of that.

I've gone into the beauty shop with my mom in Perris where you know you have a Hispanic a Japanese a couple of white, black beautician all in the same shop and they have different clientele that are all coming into the same shop, and that's just always been the culture here is that people just make it work, regardless of ideology. And there's still a lot of conservative folks. We had when I was in high school I graduated in

74, we would have people that were coming from different communities in Nuevo or people that were from downtown and the folks from Nuevo were really conservative whites and I couldn't go home with my white friends in Nuevo but coming to school that mixing pot was really very interesting, and by the way the schools are really very poor. In Perris after well I think when my sisters went to high school and I'm, you know, nine, they were nine and 10 years older than I am. They were teaching the classics. And when I came into high school in the early 70s. My mom was coming to school with me all the time complaining about the lack of quality. I couldn't get a good English class as an example. And so early on the quality of education seemed to be much better than it was in later years, and I think that Perris suffered from poor schooling and I don't know if it had anything to do with the demographic change or not. But the quality did change over time for the worse.

Jennifer Tilton: Very interesting. I guess you talked a little bit about kind of businesses and and downtown Perris. Do you have memories of sort of the growing black community and growing business owners were there were there black businesses in either the Valleys or in downtown Perris in the 60s 70s that you remember

Willie Moses: Black business?

Jennifer Tilton: Business owners?

00:56:08.000

Eleanor Moses: Dr Ultimus.

Willie Moses: We had a black doctor,

Eleanor Moses: Dr. Ultimus, they were good friends. What about the Neals, the Neals were very impressive family.. Remember the Neals?

Willie Moses: What did they run?

Eleanor Moses: I don't know.

Willie Moses: Very few. We had a pharmacist. The doctor and the pharmacist. A shoe maker, I mean, You remember?

Eleanor Moses: Oh yeah I remember him. I wouldn't speak highly of him.

Willie Moses: Oh no, but they had a business!

Eleanor Moses: Yeah that's true.

Willie Moses: And then we had, like, Black, we have beauty shops. They have one or two with black and everybody else could go to, to the same one, but they have different operators. But now it's big enough to have separate.

Eleanor Moses: Well, there were there were. She had a friend Gorge Neals, who lived here in Good Hope, and she had a beauty, beauty shop, out of her house. She was up in the Gavelin Hills. Her husband was a musician and she was the hairdresser for Tina Turner when she lived in LA. And so she, she had, you know, quite a growing business, but she was one of those families that would come out a lot of times on the weekend and then eventually they moved out here full time but they were one of the few families to have a swimming pool, when we were growing up they had a really fancy house. And I'm trying to think who else I think the black beauty shops there were a couple of them in the in the in Meade Valley. And I know there was, there was a small store in Meade Valley off of Cahalko road that was black owned for really long time.

Jennifer Tilton: You don't remember who owned it though.

Eleanor Moses: I don't.

Jennifer Tilton: Yeah,

Eleanor Moses: we can look it up though.

Jennifer Tilton: Yeah, we might be able to find it. Partly part of the reason I'm asking is that we're, you know we're doing some earlier historical research. And, you know, we see some black families living in the area back in the 40s and even the, even in 1900. Not a lot but some. So we are trying to get a sense of what that community was like even earlier, that in fact there's the first guy, I mentioned him to you and Mrs Moses the other day but in an early black newspaper that was published in Redlands in 1900, there's a mention of Crawford Carter, who lived in Perris in 1905 and owned a big ranch there. So we don't know anything about him but there are these kind of little mentions of family names like Carter and Richardson and Banks and Porter. I don't know if you remember any of the early families who lived there, even before you remember any names of kind of old folks who were there before you guys got there or not so much.

Willie Moses: I don't know any. It was very few when we got here.

Eleanor Moses: Do you remember who they were?

Willie Moses: The Neil's

Eleanor Moses: Were they here then?

Willie Moses: Gardeners, they were a big family, worked in the potato harvests,

Eleanor Moses: The Gardener's?

Willie Moses: Then with this the few blacks that was at school. You get to know the families. Not all at once. You know, as people, steady comin, then it grew, and you had more.

Eleanor Moses: Oh, there was a plumber. Smokey the plumber. That was a black business Smokey Townsend.

Willie Moses: Oh yeah.

Eleanor Moses: He was here a long time.

Willie Moses: Yeah. Townsend,

Eleanor Moses: Do you remember his first name. Yeah, his daughter, his daughter Lasena we stay in contact with but he was an old plumber, too. He was here early on I think.

Jennifer Tilton: One thing I, we kind of have been wondering about, were there a lot of people who also worked at March Air Force Base in the community? Was the Air Force Base a big part of community life in any way? It's not so far away but I don't know if it was if people who work there lived in the valley or mostly lived on base.

Eleanor Moses: Well it was very popular with single women, (laughing) including Mother had a long term boyfriend from March Air Force Base.

Jennifer Tilton: Do you remember what the base was like back then when you were dating him?

01:02:38.000

Willie Moses: Oh, we had good times at happy hour and the NCO club. It was a decent place to go for recreation, you know.

Eleanor Moses: And you would have some of the, the young airman come for holidays.

Willie Moses: Yes, someone was, they were talking about. Mother used to have young men that didn't go home for holidays and stuff. We always had a lot of people, because I was in food service. So I knew how to cook for crowds. And we'd always have a lot of people, and they really enjoyed it. Because, you know, young and away from home. And we have holidays and all and we would just invite young people over and they were happy to come because they're very gentleman like, and all.

01:04:00.000

Eleanor Moses: So we have that we have a really large old house and my dad built a family room at the back of the house which was Party Central. My two older sisters Gwen and Yolanda were dating in the era of chaperones. And so, he felt like with four girls that he wanted to know where we were, and so a lot of folks socialized here in in the big family room. And then as they grew up and moved on you know the holidays and parties and that continue again, like she said she would have, you know, you know, to to have 5,6,7 airman, you know that would come for the holidays, and that were friends of people that she knew or the guy that she dated. And they'd come out on weekends just like our family. We had a lot of family that would come from LA on the weekends and stay at our house. And so all of that continued for a long time and then my folks would do big holiday parties and so they just have a very diverse group of people that were here, you know socializing all the time so it was very lively at one point.

And it was it was interesting in the black community some of our neighbors were really super religious. And so my mom for her era was a very outspoken woman, and she wore mini skirts and, you know, was very vocal politically. And some of my, my friends that had really religious parents had a hard time dealing with her, her personality. She's a she's an outlier for her for her generation, and, and then just you know drinking and partying and having a good time, and it was all healthy It was no overkill but there is a, you know, a very traditional religious black community that has kind of some rigid mores about what's acceptable behavior.

Hailey McKenzie: Were you guys members of a local church there?

01:06:29.000

Willie Moses: Yes. I went to Bethel AME for 60 years. I had a friend that just passed was 109. And we had been friends, all of those years.

Eleanor Moses: Sarah Ellen Ursure

Willie Moses: Sarah Ellen and she just passed away last month. There's one of the churches and First Baptist, is downtown Perris. Those are two outstanding names I know of and there's other storefront, churches.

Eleanor Moses: But you were you were involved with the Bethel AME

Willie Moses: But, yes, I was at Bethel AME church.

Jennifer Tilton: And where is that church? Where is Bethel AME?

Willie Moses: In Good Hope.

Jennifer Tilton: Okay. Okay. Do you know kind of when it was started and can you tell us a little bit about what it was like when you first moved to the area.

Willie Moses: It was

Eleanor Moses: downtown Perris wasn't it wasn't downtown Perris.

Willie Moses: No, it was someone donated the land, one of the realtors gave him the land and it was started in 46 because that's the year my daughter, my oldest daughter was born. And that's how I always remember when we have anniversaries, you know, what year it was because. It was donated land and the barracks from March, Air Force Base, somebody was. It was donated, and then they moved it on to the space for the church and the realtor, Upton was the realtor, Caucasian, and he donated a spot of land. And that was the church.

Jennifer Tilton: And what drew you to that church, why did you decide to be a member of that church what was what was special about it for you.

Willie Moses: Well, it was a black church, African American, and it was just.

Eleanor Moses: You belonged to an AME.

Willie Moses: I belonged to a CME Methodist in LA, and when I moved out here, it was no other CME. So then I just joined the African American, and it was family and friends. Everybody knew everybody and for years, it was that way. In later years a lot of people died off, and so it's not as big as it was. But during that time, it was one of the few places you could socialize and mingle and do things.

Eleanor Moses: Well AME church has also been historically more socially active in terms of you know political involvement and, and they don't mind if you have a beer at your social event. Yeah, little more action oriented.

Willie Moses: They were social.

01:10:54.000

Jennifer Tilton: What were some of the social kinds of events they would have in their kind of social or political events they would have in the 50s and 60s that you remember.

Willie Moses: Well, we did a lot of voting and registering voters and doing things like that to bring people together. When it was something we were working on, the church participated in it because they believed in working with everything to make things better. And being a kind of new environment everything was needed. So you could always find something that needed working on or with. And that's how we accomplished a lot of things that other people didn't have is because we would work together through the church.

Hailey McKenzie: Is the church still in the same location today as it was.

Willie Moses: Yes, it is.

Jennifer Tilton: But does it have a new building or is it still in the march Air Force building that's a pretty cool story

Eleanor Moses: It's a new building, they'd built that church and the parsonage.

Willie Moses: and they have a parsonage too to go with the church. It's a house it's a three bedroom house. We had a mini fish fryer raising money. I know that. But a lot of the older folks have gone on so, new members.

Hailey McKenzie: So, can I ask a little bit about the civil rights movement, and any memories you have from that time and if that changed things in your community at all.

01:13:35.000

Willie Moses: There were riots. Well, we're always working on something with the civil rights. That's how a lot of black communities get anything done is through civil rights.

Eleanor Moses: Do you remember any events or?

Willie Moses: Well the human relations. That was a grant from UC Riverside I think. I'm thinking about the leader, I think he was from UCR.

Eleanor Moses: Who was that?

Willie Moses: Fred. I don't remember his last name but I know his first name was Fred.

Eleanor Moses: So what kinds of things that Human Relations Commission do to - towards equality.

Willie Moses: They were always working on school and things like that where they needed help, because all the schools weren't, schools weren't always nice.

Eleanor Moses: But I think one of the things with the Human Relations Commission is that it was you know they had encountered groups that were diverse and so there were whites that really didn't understand what was going on. And, you know, they had a lot of really candid conversations and did retreats in the community with a diverse group and I, I think it would be interesting to look that up because I think it did kind of change the trajectory of things in the community, in terms of having deep dialogue to kind of work through and educate folks that didn't understand the impact of racism on people of color, at that time, and I think it was really rich work that happened. And when I talked to people you know, in an urban area about some of the encounter groups that we had in, when I was in junior high school which really helped to make me a more socially conscious person, to really think about the impact that you have on other people and how other people think differently and listening and understanding other people's culture, you know, we were doing that work. Because of the Human Relations Commission back in the late 60s early 70s in Perris, and I think it was really a valuable piece of work, and I know that we would organize politically. I can't, I was too young to remember but I remember going into political offices with Clarence Muse and my mom and organizing people to vote but also to do rallies and that sort of thing too. So I don't know are you remembering any of that work that you did? Civil rights work that you did rallies or marches or anything like that in Perris, political rallies.

01:17:19.000

Willie Moses: We'd have rallies to talk about diversity and all. And we have mixed groups. because some of the people still learned nothing because they weren't successful, but they didn't really want to learn. But some of the people were anxious and really worked hard at understanding. Because we were at UC Riverside, with a meeting with the seniors, and a lady said to me, the guy said. It's not enough minorities in this program. it should be more minorities in it." And this lady says to me, "I don't know a thing about that, do you Willie?" I said, "Yes 65 years of it, racism. Now, anything you have you want to know about racism. I have an answer, cause I've had 65 years of it." And she was a leader in an organization. She didn't want to learn nothing.

Eleanor Moses: So, you know, my experience is that there are a lot of clueless people that you've worked with over the years here in the valley. So how do you, how have you kind of maintained your persistence on working through relationships and bringing people along without getting bitter.

01:19:33.000

Willie Moses: I'm like my mother. I'm an observer. I listen to things. And I hear 'em through.

And with the wisdom and knowledge I have accumulated, I say what I mean. And I mean what I say. I don't be quiet, to make somebody else feel good. Cause I'm who I am. And I think if you be honest, in what you're doing from the beginning, then you don't have to have no upset.

Eleanor Moses: So talk about some of the relationships that you've developed with the county supervisors and some of the people in leadership in Riverside County, why do you think that they come to you for advice about what's going on in the community.

01:20:44.000

Willie Moses: Well, I think I'm gonna be honest, which I am, and always believe in being fair and listen to the other side and then come to your own conclusion, I don't have to think like you, because you say so cause I have a mind of my own. But I'm always truthful and honest. And that'll pay off everyday. I was teaching Peyton that when she was here. Yeah, I was talking to my 10 year old niece and I was telling her things I don't think she was getting at home. And I was telling her, as you always be honest and fair, and it pays off in the end. Cause, you don't have to go back and try to clean up something that you've done without listening and hearing things completely through, and then make a decision. That's my motto.

Hailey McKenzie: Well, I personally have one last question for you. I would love to know how you've seen racism change throughout your lifetime up to the present day.

Willie Moses: I didn't hear

Eleanor Moses: How you've seen racism change in your lifetime, up to the present day? How has it changed how has racism changed it through your lifetime from Louisiana maybe some of the early relationships to now?

01:23:01.000

Willie Moses: Some changes, but it's not as many as could be.

Eleanor Moses: For you, talk about in your lifetime, what have you seen?

Willie Moses: Oh, I've seen during World War II, I had a classmate went to Officer's Candidate School and came home on furlough, and they made him get off the sidewalk. And when people are talking about race

Eleanor Moses: Was that in the south, was that in the south?

Willie Moses: in Louisiana. And so many places that I've been, insulted right to my face. People don't care what they say to you and think you should accept it. But like I said, I always try to be fair and honest.

Eleanor Moses: So what's changed. So when people were not respectful, was that in the past, how are things different now?

Willie Moses: Some places haven't changed. And I think it's gonna be some time before they do change because people don't want to change. You see the things going on right now. And people know better. But they don't, they don't mind insulting you and thinking you should have to accept it. So some change has been made, but a lot of things haven't changed one inch. It's just where you find it.

Jennifer Tilton: Can I ask a follow up question in some ways for the younger generation younger than me. What would you want to tell the younger generation, about how to approach, continuing to struggle for racial justice, or to overcome racism? What messages would you want to leave a younger generation after you?

01:25:52.000

Willie Moses: I think one should be themselves at all times. And I think that a situation come up and you review it and give it honest thought and everything. And don't do something to make somebody else feel good that makes you uncomfortable. I don't think I owe anyone that. I think I should weigh the situation and give it thought and then make my own decision being honest and just.

Eleanor Moses: And the road less traveled, the road less traveled the road less traveled,

Willie Moses: Yeah. When my niece came to Perris, from LA and the principal and vice principal agreed that she was only 14 she was coming from Los Angeles, but she had been involved in a high school. And they said if she could maintain her grade and all. And in two years at the high school when she graduated she gave the speech, "The road less traveled." And some of the older people in the school just sent the nicest notes and how proud they were of that speech. And it made me feel good because I told them I taught you everything I know, now go for it. Be sure you do the best you can. Whatever you do, and she did.

Eleanor Moses: The road less traveled the road less. That house by this side of the road.

Willie Moses: Oh, and when I was 15 years old. Ha, a hundred years ago. I won the speech contest in a classroom. We had a small school and some classrooms was used for study rooms, and I was listening to some older students studying for a speech contest. "Let me a live in the house by the side of the road and be a friend to man. And I learned it by just listening to it from other people. And I won the contest. It was good for me because it was part of my highway to life. Let me live in a house by the side of the road, and be a friend to man. And I think if you have some good - I think it made me a better person from that. And I still say, let me live in the house by the side of the road and be a friend to man. Not a good highway, not a bad highway, to follow. If you have heart.

Jennifer Tilton: That's a wonderful thing to live by. And maybe a decent time to end because we've been talking for a good long while. So maybe thank you so much for sharing some of your stories with us and we will be in touch and share the transcript with you, as we finish it, and see if we have any follow up questions to ask.

Hailey McKenzie: Thank you so much. This was lovely

Jennifer Tilton: It was really great.

Willie Moses: Thank you for asking. And I gave you the best that I knew. And I still live by my mantra. Let me live in a house by the side of the road, and be a friend to man.

Jennifer Tilton: Awesome. Thank you.

End of Interview:

[01:31:28]