

Episode #5 transcript - Sandra King-Shaw - Asbury UMC DC Oral Histories podcast

Asbury United Methodist Church, Washington, DC

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INTRO CLIP:

“People hadn't thought about having Black girls do anything except church stuff and some school things. But Girl Scouting was perceived by everybody to be white. ‘And you mean, you have Black Girl Scouts? You have Black girls who were Girl Scouts?’ ‘Uh-huh.’ ‘Oh, what do you all -- what do you all do?’ ‘Same thing you do.’”

WELCOME TO THIS EPISODE OF ASBURY UMC DC ORAL HISTORIES, FEATURING INTERVIEWS FROM ASBURY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH IN WASHINGTON, DC.

THESE EPISODES ARE DRAWN FROM ORAL HISTORIES OF MEMBERS OF ONE OF WASHINGTON'S HISTORIC BLACK CHURCHES. ASBURY HAS BEEN AT THE CORNER OF 11TH AND K STREETS, NORTHWEST, SINCE ITS FOUNDING IN 1836. THESE CHURCH MEMBERS SHARE THEIR PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITH BLACK HISTORY, NATIONAL HISTORY AND THE HISTORY OF THE WASHINGTON, DC, AREA.

THIS EPISODE WILL FEATURE SANDRA KING-SHAW, A WASHINGTONIAN WHO WORKED FOR THE GIRL SCOUTS FOR MORE THAN 25 YEARS. SHE WAS A LAY SPEAKER AT ASBURY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, WHERE SHE WAS AN ACTIVE MEMBER UNTIL HER DEATH IN 2019. IN A CONVERSATION IN 2017 WITH INTERVIEWER ADELLE BANKS, SHE DISCUSSED HER MEMORIES OF WASHINGTON'S NEIGHBORHOODS, HER MEMBERSHIP IN ASBURY'S FIRST GIRL SCOUT TROOP AND HER TIME AS AN EXECUTIVE OF THE GIRL SCOUT COUNCIL OF THE NATION'S CAPITAL.

WE START WITH SANDRA KING-SHAW'S RECOUNTING OF HER FAMILY'S HISTORY THAT DATES TO THE EARLIEST DAYS OF HER CHURCH.

2:03

Adelle Banks: So tell me a little bit more about your family's history with Asbury. Does it go back parents and grandparents?

Sandra King-Shaw: My mother's grandfather. My mother was born in Washington, D.C., in 1900. Both my parents were born in 1900. My mother's grandfather was part of the group that built the -- that frame building, that first Asbury. Her parents raised her and her brother at Asbury. And Mama was born and was baptized at Asbury. And we all were baptized there and grew up there.

So from the very beginning, my life is an Asbury life.

AB: And your parents were married at Asbury?

SK: At Asbury.

AB: When?

SK: On January 1st in 1920. On New Year's Day. My mama said they were married by candlelight. Of course, in 1920, you didn't have electricity like that. And her mother made her wedding gown, which Mama said was made of white velvet.

2:59

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[NARRATION/BRIDGE] SANDRA KING-SHAW RECALLS HER DAYS AS AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENT IN NORTHWEST WASHINGTON AND HER TIME AS A HIGH SCHOOLER IN NORTHEAST WASHINGTON BEFORE HER COLLEGE YEARS AT HOWARD UNIVERSITY.

SK: The first house I remember was on Hobart Place, which is, si-- six blocks north of Howard University.

AB: What was a typical day like in that -- that neighborhood?

SK: You went to school. You came home. You better get home on time. And back in those days, at least many kids I knew wore keys. We were latchkey children. I said that to my -- one of my grandchildren. What's a latchkey child? I said, that's right, you would not even know that. I said -- because nobody was home when we came home, and so I wore the key around my neck. Today you wouldn't do that. But I wore the key around my neck. 'Cause my -- my -- both -- both my parents worked and my sisters were either in school or in school. I mean, they were in school, so I don't remember ever coming home to -- to anybody home but me. We had a big dog. We had a big husky, who was bought as a watchdog, was trained as a watchdog, and would take apart anybody who tried to come in that house who didn't live there. He didn't play. And he was trained for that. He came as a puppy, big puppy too. But he was trained to protect the house in general and me in particular. And he did.

AB: And then after your public school education, you went to Howard.

SK: Mm-hmm.

AB: How did you decide to go there?

SK: By then, we had moved out to Benning Road. And all children living east of, whatever, 15th Street, went to Spingarn. That's how I got to Spingarn. When college time came, actually there were two places. There was one place I wanted to -- I wanted to go to Fisk [University in Nashville, Tenn.]. I really did. And the wife of [historian] John Hope Franklin was our librarian. And yeah.

AB: At the high school?

SK: At the high school. She was our librarian. [narrator laughs] So and I would hear his name later and went "That's his wife." And she was helpful in -- in helping me get a scholarship, but for the second semester. We could not afford even the first semester. There was no money. We did not own our house. My father said -- I'm told -- "I can't have house and educate my children. Someone can -- can take the house from them. If they have education, nobody can take that from them." So he -- he -- they were all educated. But when my time came, he had died. He died when I was 13. And I said to myself, well, okay, not everybody goes to college. I guess I won't go to college. And I tried to get myself together. There was no money. But my second eldest sister, Doris, the one who's the brain in the family, had finished graduate school. She had her degrees. She was teaching. And she called my mother. She taught -- her first teaching job was at Rust College in Holly Springs, Mississippi. So she called my mother and said, "I will pay her tuition. You send the bills to me, and I'll pay for it." And she did. If it hadn't been for Doris, I wouldn't have gone to college. She paid for my four years of college. And so she said to me, "Mama's gonna send me the bill. You send me your grades as well as Mama and don't -- don't mess around. Don't play. Don't play." But that's how I went to Howard. And so I stayed at home. We didn't have money to live on campus.

6:18

[NARRATION/BRIDGE] SANDRA KING-SHAW REMEMBERS HOW ASBURY'S MEMBERS AND CLERGY SPOKE UP DURING KEY TIMES IN OUR NATION'S HISTORY FROM THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT TO THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT, FOR WHICH THE CHURCH POSTED A SIGN OF SUPPORT IN FRONT OF ITS BUILDING.

SK: Now, I was young for the earlier part of it, but, yes, the civil rights movement, the March on Washington. Being strong when other Black churches were being timid. And I've been so proud of Asbury. There were times when Asbury was strong and out there and in front when other African-American churches in Washington were kind of being quiet. Well, you know, we have to be quiet, we can't be quite so bold. And there was a time when I was -- one of the times, one of the many times I was so proud of Asbury with -- with [Rev. Louis] Lou Shockley as our leadership.

During the -- the Rainbow Concert and Asbury hosted it. I said, that's my church. Beatrice looked at it. She looked at the announcement. She said, "Asbury, that's my mother's church." She called me and said, "Mom." I said mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

AB: What was the Rainbow Concert?

SK: It was the LGBT. And we welcomed them -- and the place was packed. And that was Lou Shockley. That was -- he pushed -- he pushed on that. For the Million Man March that lots of Black people were

nervous about, that Sunday [Rev.] Eugene Matthews had his big button on on top of his robe. I said, that's my pastor. That -- see, when -- when other Black churches were being timid and were doing things quietly, Asbury has been out there on its conviction. When I see things like that, I -- I'm so proud to be a part of that fellowship. When Rev. [lanther] Mills was part of -- of the Black Lives Matter -- and then Beatrice, who rides the bus comes by [inaudible]. The first time she saw the Black Lives Matter [banner outside Asbury United Methodist Church], she said, "What?" She said, "That's my mother's church." And the lady riding with her said that's your -- she said, "That's my mother's church. You see that sign? My mother's church and my grandmother's church." When I see that, I go, you know, all those people before us who sold chicken dinners, who made programs when we didn't have the big fancy printer, who sat and did the mailing when we didn't have that fancy printer, who would make phone calls, who would go visit people who were lost and lonely, who would pray with folks on the street. Those are the people who have made Asbury. The people who -- who make wonderful speeches have too, but those are the people who did the work that Jesus would do 'cause Jesus would do that.

9:10

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[NARRATION/BRIDGE] SANDRA KING-SHAW HAS FOND MEMORIES OF BEING PART OF ASBURY'S FIRST GIRL SCOUT TROOP, WHICH STARTED AROUND 1949.

SK: I was a Brownie. And I didn't know how spectacular that was. But yeah. In the first Girl Scout troop at Asbury. There were quite a few of us. It was a good-sized troop. A big troop.

AB: Do you remember anything about that troop?

SK: Mm-hmm. We did plays. We did things. We made things. We went on local trips. Some of us went camping. And as it turned out in its early ages of wanting to foster desegregation and integration, there were girls selected from different troops around -- Black and white troops to go to a camp together in Massachusetts. And I was one selected. I don't remember the others, but I was one -- one of them selected. We went to a camp. It was called Camp Bonnie Brae.

There were Black girls there and white girls there hoping to get us started in knowing each other for real. And it was an interesting experience. I remember the one thing I did not like -- 'cause we were asked about it. I said -- 'cause I was the only Black girl in my tent. And I said I didn't mind being the only - - but to be the only one in a tent of maybe 12 girls. I said to be the only one, I did not like. I was mouthy even then. I -- I just did not like. But I learned a lot.

AB: Did you not like it because you felt uncomfortable? Did you feel you were in danger? Or you just --

SK: No.

AB: -- were not comfortable.

SK: I didn't have anybody to share anything with. Nobody knew what I knew, and I didn't know what they knew. I didn't know the white world as I do now, as I did as -- as I became older because I was in -- I

guess I was in junior high. In high school, more -- in college, I learned more about the white world. I remember having a discussion with somebody about the white world and what I knew and what you didn't know about my world. But then I -- when I realized I was the only one in the tent, they -- so it wasn't even. There were many more white girls than there were Black girls. And I'm trying to remember if -- about the camp counselors. I can't remember whether there were any Black counselors, but it doesn't mean there weren't any. I know our swimming instructor was white. I remember the head cook was white. Arts. Maybe we had somebody for arts. I remember -- but I remember the swimming instructor. And I had a good time. And it was a train ride. It was -- you know, we didn't go up. We went -- came up -- we went up to this place in uniform. We wore a uniform up and back on the train. And it was fine. There was no problem there. But I'm glad I had that opportunity. It was the first time living among white people. Don't know what it prepared me for, but I'm sure it did.

11:46

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[NARRATION/BRIDGE] SANDRA KING-SHAW BECAME A REGIONAL MANAGER FOR NORC, THE NATIONAL OPINION RESEARCH CENTER, BUT AFTER TRAVELING WITHIN AND BEYOND THE REGION FOR THAT ROLE, SHE SAW A JOB LISTING IN THE NEWSPAPER FOR A FIELD DIRECTOR FOR THE GIRL SCOUTS.

SK: And field directors are people -- they now call them -- people who are recruiters. They are neighborhood recruiters. And I said, well, let me apply for that. So I sent my application in. Let's say they -- they must have gotten it in the mail on Wednesday. I got it back, a rejection back, on Thursday. Well, that made me mad. I called, and I said, "I'm Sandra King-Shaw." "Well --" I said, "You didn't open the envelope. You could not have mailed it back to me the day after you got it if you had read it. What you decided was that you weren't gonna hire me regardless of what else you were looking for." The -- the receptionist said, "Well, ma'am, I'm sorry. I think maybe we just filled all the positions." I said, "I understand that, but you should have said that in whatever you sent to me. Don't send me something that implies you've read my -- my resume and rejected me. That's not what happened." She said, "Well, hold on." [narrator laughs] And the director of the department came on and -- no, human resources came on. And she apologized. I said, "Okay. I just wanted to make my point." She said, "Are you still available?" I said, "Yes, I am." She said, "Can you come in day after tomorrow?" I said, "Yes, I can." Now, mind you, I had -- I'd run for can- -- I've run for office out here [Montgomery County, Maryland] twice. I had run for office.

AB: What kind of office?

SK: Board of education. I had run for office out here. I had done this other thing for NORC. All of that. And I had been a major volunteer in -- in PTA, but also in other activities. So I knew the area. I knew how to recruit. And when I went in for my interview, I said all of that. Brought all of that to her. And she said, "Okay." [phone rings] I got a call the next morning. "Can you -- can you meet with the human resources director?" I said yes. And I came in the next day. And I had brought it in writing again what I had sent to them. And I -- she said -- and so they said, "We'll be in touch with you." And I got a call the next morning offering me the position. I said, "Are you sure?" She said yes. So I said okay. And I went in. And we talked salary. And I didn't negotiate. I didn't know enough to negotiate then, but that was fine because it meant I could be stable. And I went to work for the Girl Scouts. And I was a membership recruiter.

14:10

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[NARRATION/BRIDGE] RISING UP THE RANKS OF THE SCOUTTING ORGANIZATION, SANDRA KING-SHAW BECAME AN AREA MANAGER WHO SUPERVISED FIELD RECRUITERS AND, LATER, DIRECTOR OF MEMBERSHIP SERVICES.

SK: I like management. I know most people don't. I like management. I like administration. I like being the person where -- I like being where the buck stops or close to where the buck stops. I don't mind that. I enjoy that. It -- it allows me the opportunity to shape things, and I like doing that. And I don't mind being held accountable.

I was an excellent employee. No hitches. I did what I was supposed to do and then some. I supervised managers. And I would say to them in addition to meeting our goals, I want you to be as strong as you can be. When you are working at things, think of how this will look on your resume for your next job 'cause you didn't come to this position to die.

So how -- how do you put this on your resume. And so people who were under my direction became managers. One of them went out to run another council. I like that. And when they screwed up, I held them accountable. And when I screwed up, which was not often -- because I was number two behind the executive director, behind the -- the CEO. And when I screwed up, she would call me. But it didn't happen often. I was good. And I set a tone in the office, I would say to young women who wanted to -- to rise in management look at the person who holds the position you want. Watch how she dresses. You want to be a manager, dress like one, which means you're not coming in here with jeans when it's not dress down day. You don't have to have fancy clothes. You don't have to have new or expensive clothes. But you have to dress like you know who you are. And so look at the woman who -- who holds your -- the position that you'd like to have or similar to the one you'd like to have and see how she carries herself. And I'm telling you, don't look at the guys because they're different. Look at the woman. I'm here to tell you don't -- I don't want to hear women can't run a business. Girl Scouts are an extremely efficiently run business. Extremely efficient. We understand what bottom line means, both in -- because we had membership goals. In fact, we were paid by performance. You didn't get an automatic raise at all. Ever. Merit performance.

16:35

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[NARRATION/BRIDGE] SANDRA KING-SHAW DESCRIBED WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO BE THE FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN TO SERVE AS AN AREA MANAGER AT THE GIRL SCOUT COUNCIL WHERE SHE WORKED.

SK: And Girl Scouts had never had anybody of color.

AB: Was that challenging at times?

SK: To me? Nuh-uh. I had run for office. I had gone into places where they weren't looking for anybody whose skin was even palely white, let alone Black. Nuh-uh. So no. I had already gotten all that done. I had met with people who would blink, and I'd blink back. One time [narrator laughs slightly] -- forgot -- I was staffing a position because I didn't have a field director. And this was in southern Maryland. And one of the volunteers from there said to me -- came into my office. He said, "I know you're meeting with our folks tonight." Just a white guy in an all-white group. He said, "When you come, could you kind of be humble?" I said, "What?" He said, "Could you kind of be --" I said, "What does that mean?" And he told me what -- what he meant. I said, "Well, let me tell you something. I go down on my knees before my Lord. Beyond that, nobody else. So I don't know what you're expecting, but if that's what you're looking for, that's not going to happen tonight." He says, "Okay. I'm sorry to hear that. Can we meet with your executive director?" I said, "Absolutely." So I -- I called my -- the CEO. And called to ask her -- now this was the interim. Can we [inaudible]. She said, "Absolutely." So I said, "Would you like me to step out?" He said no. So he said to her -- he told her, "Well, I asked Mrs. King-Shaw. We were having this meeting, yadda, yadda, ya. I asked her if she would please be humble." And she said -- and the -- the CEO said, "And what did she say?" "She said that she was not gonna go on her knees for anybody except her Lord." And she said, "That's the right answer." He said, "But -- ." She said, "That's the right answer. We -- we don't expect our employees to be humble." She said, "I'm -- I don't know what you were expecting her to say, but she gave the correct answer." Be humble. Be humble? Nuh-uh. I don't do humble. I do humble before God. And that's it.

AB: This was a man affiliated with the Girl Scouts?

SK: Oh, yeah. We have guys working for the Girl Scouts.

AB: Asking you to do this at a Girl Scout gathering --

SK: Yes.

AB: -- meeting?

SK: Yes. I said no.

AB: So full circle here related to the Girl Scouts.

SK: Mm-hmm.

AB: Do you see a connection between your being a Brownie at Asbury United Methodist Church in the first troop to the extent of work you ended up doing as an employee for the council?

SK: I don't think so. I think because I -- I stayed in Girl Scouting all of my childhood through high school. Maybe. I just had never thought about it. So maybe. Maybe. We did things that Girl Scouts -- that young, young Black girls didn't do. And Girl Scouting in D.C. was connected through church. Now you find them in schools, you find them -- but then they were in Black churches.

AB: What did you do that Black girls didn't do as -- in scouting? What do you mean?

SK: I don't know. I mean, Black girls -- people hadn't thought about having Black girls do anything except church stuff and some school things. But Girl Scouting was perceived by everybody to be white. "And you mean, you have Black Girl Scouts? You have Black girls who were Girl Scouts?" "Uh-huh." "Oh, what do you all -- what do you all do? Same thing you do. I -- we -- I use the same handbook you do, make the same pledge you make." "Oh." And it took a while. When people say to me nothing has changed, I go you're wrong. You're so wrong. There's more that needs to change, but a whole lot of stuff has changed in my lifetime. And imagine in the lifetimes of the people who preceded us. There's a lot that needs to change, but a whole has changed in a few short years. And stuff is changing as we speak. So don't -- don't tell me nothing has changed. Don't even tell me that. If that's all you can say, then you go somewhere else. I have nothing for you. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

20:31

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[NARRATION/BRIDGE] BEYOND HER WORK WITH THE GIRL SCOUT COUNCIL, SANDRA KING-SHAW DEDICATED MUCH OF HER TIME TO CHURCH ACTIVITIES. SHE WAS THE DIRECTOR OF CERTIFIED LAY MINISTRY FOR THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH'S BALTIMORE-WASHINGTON CONFERENCE. HER ROLES AT ASBURY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH INCLUDED SERVING HOMEBOUND MEMBERS COMMUNION AND BEING A STAPLE AT ITS NEIGHBOR-TO-NEIGHBOR BREAKFAST THAT HAS ROUTINELY SERVED PEOPLE ON THE LAST SUNDAY OF EACH MONTH.

SK: Other things I've had that I've loved, but those are it, the -- the Communion and Neighbor-to-Neighbor.

AB: Why?

SK: Because it allows me to touch people, to serve people, hopefully to bring some peace to their lives even for a few minutes, to bring Asbury to people who can't come who -- who miss Asbury and who miss Communion. The person who lights up when she sees the word "Asbury." Doesn't know anything else. Or we have one lady whose favorite hymn is "My Hope Is Built On Nothing Less." And so when I start to singing, she begins to move with it.

And for the breakfast, all the people who don't have or who have just a little bit, who are sad or who are angry or who are looking or who are hungry for a touch. Yes, food, but for someone to be respectful. Some people have said more than one time to us, "You know what we like about here? You all respect us. You'd be amazed at the places we go where we don't get respect. You respect us." And, you know, I stand at the door and hug people.

And I say -- "You don't want to hug me this morning? What? What is your problem?" Or when they come and they say, "Oh, here's my lady" and they kiss my hand. And I serve -- what I want to do is to get to the point where we sit and have breakfast with our neighbors. And not just serving, but to have breakfast. So that we are indeed brothers and sisters. Right now we're not yet. We're servers and served, but we're not brothers and sisters, and I want us to be brothers and sisters. Those are the two ministries we have that -- that are brother and sisters kind of things.

AB: Of all the things you've done in your life,--

SK: Um-hmm.

AB: -- what was the greatest and what has been the greatest blessing?

SK: My children and grandchildren. To watch the adults they've become and to see the parents and the spouses they are. I don't know so much about how they are as a spouse, but I can see through my grandchildren the parenting that they're doing. And I'm so grateful to God, to them for their -- and that - that really has been the blessing to me.

23:17

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