

**Jacque S. Polk**  
**Narrator**

**Eleanor Benson**  
**Macalester College**  
**Interviewer**

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**At the Hallie Q. Brown Community Center**  
**St. Paul, Minnesota**

**JP:** My name, at birth, Jacqueline Jean Southern Polk. Otherwise known as Peaches [Laughs].

**EB:** When and where were you born?

**JP:** Anchor Hospital, St. Paul, Minnesota. 1935. I left Saint Paul May 9, 1954. I got married May 8th, and we left on our honeymoon on the 9th. My husband was an officer in the Air Force. We went to his home first, Lexington Mississippi. Big mistake [Laughs]. You don't take a Northern girl down South in 1954! And then we went to Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Oldest Air Force Base.

**EB:** Where in Rondo did you live?

**JP:** Two places. I lived on 716 and 888. We rented at 716. I was too young to know that, but now of course I do. It's gone. It's on the East side. But my last home, 888 is still there. It hurts my heart. Cause they haven't taken care of it.

**EB:** Do you have any family in the area?

**JP:** [Laughs]. At noon today, I have young family that I did not know existed. A cousin, my first cousin lived in Minneapolis and my grandparents lived in Minneapolis. So we were buddies when we were young. Whenever I went over there to visit. I'm never been a "group-er." I'm not a joiner. I go from place to place with different groups of people. I went to her memorial. Very out of place for me now: I don't do Memorials, I don't do births, I don't do weddings. But I went for this, I went for her husband. Because he called me and I said, "Okay, I'll come Bill." So he said, "Do you wanna say something on the mic?" And I said, "Okay." I got up there and I said, "I'm Peaches, Bev's cousin." And I heard in the audience people [Mimes looking around scared]. Well I had no idea she had told everybody under the sun about us growing up! And there was family. I had no idea I had all this family!

Well, we were going to have a big get-together today, but the majority of them couldn't come. Which it turns out to be great, 'cause there's only gonna be about five or six of us and I can squish them into my apartment. Because RayAnn says, my young cousin, god love her, sweetest little thing. You must realize I'm 81 years old so you all are children to me [Laughs]. [RayAnn] says, "Oh, that's great! 'Cause you're gonna be bombarded with questions." They know nothing about the maternal side, and the German, and the Indians. Which we are! My grandparents were German. So when they came here, it wasn't good to be German. And as Europeans, they spoke more than one language. So my first language was French. And I thought we were French. For years! And one day I'm sitting down with a cousin and we got into a conversation and she says, "We're not French." "What do you mean, we're not French?" She says, "We're German!" I'm like, "What?" And I knew about the Indian, 'cause when my folks first when they came over were down in Keokuk, Iowa and that's where the Sioux have, well now it's a reservation, but that's where they were most of the time. And I knew a woman who was born and raised there. And went to Los Angeles and that's where I came back from 11 years ago. Knew all our history. And I let her die before I got all the history!

**EB:** What is your favorite memory of Rondo?

**JP:** My favorite memory. It's a weird one. The Street Car. If I wasn't ready for school, he would stop in front of my house and pull the cord. And every day, he'd come. Rain, snow, sleet, whatever. For me to go to school. I went to St. Agnes. I was the first person of color to go there. And the first person to graduate from there. 1953.

What was that like? [Sighs]. I ignored it. There were several guys--I like guys, I pick up guys, I don't know what it is about me that says men, but I love men and they love me. And I got along with the guys. The girls? Forget it. I have one friend, Rita, to this day, from there. I didn't like the nuns, they didn't like me. 'Cause I ask questions. And we get in religion classes. And you may be Catholic, which I was at that time. I asked questions. We were told that there were three heads in one with god. [Raises hand] "How do you get three heads in one?" (I'm in the third grade now). The nun said you take it on faith. [Raises hand] "Where do you get faith?" Well I kept on, and kept on. That was the third grade. By the fifth grade, I'd been kicked out of the class. Religiously. Forget her, get her out of religion class! But they didn't know, they weren't hurting my feelings. I was a reading. And I would go to the Library or Study Hall. That was fine, great! I can read! I've always got a book with me, everywhere I go. So, that was that [Laughs].

**EB:** Where did you go for entertainment?

**JP:** The Stirling Club. My parents gave me a party. I think I was 14, I said 16. And a girlfriend of mine had the clippings, that her sister who was my buddy had, and I was 14! I was very surprised. That was a big deal, that was a big deal back then. The Sterling Club was the place. Our parents had no places to go for entertainment. They had two or three clubs. But everything

was done in the home. They would go from home to home. I was too young to know too much or to care [Laughs]. I was too busy. I always said as a kid, I guess I heard it from somebody: St. Paul is for families. You come here, you raise your kids, and you party in Minneapolis. Honey, that was back then, but same thing today. Yep, we went to North Minneapolis. It has not changed!

We all went to certain churches. I went to St. Philip's. If you've heard about the Episcopalian Homes, well that was an Episcopalian home, that's part of an Episcopalian home. That's where I lived, on Dale and University. What is so ironic, I'm on the side of University, that we weren't allowed to come over to. Well, we could come over cause I had to come over to go to school. But as a whole, it was like a no-no. An unsaid no-no. And you better not...any of the guys. Because, driving. It's called DWB: Driving While Black.

**EB:** Did Old Rondo have a strong sense of community?

**JP:** Oh yes. It was a village. Everything--even though I came from Kent and Thomas, from school at St. Agnes--if I did anything wrong my mother knew about it by the time I got home. And I might have gotten a whipping on the way home a couple times. There was one lady in here, who you videoed I think, Margaret Ann Lovejoy. Her mother potty trained my two oldest children 'cause I came back here to have them 'cause my husband was in Greenland, not Greenland, not Iceland, not Labrador...anyway, it was somewhere up there and the dependents couldn't go. So I came back home. And I went back to try to get some of my credits in college at the U. But she potty trained both of my oldest children, my boys [Laughs]. Wonderful, wonderful, person [unclear]. We were all family. There was no one you called by their first name. Oh no, no no no no no. You are Aunt, Uncle, Mr., Mrs. And you could tell how close they were by what you called them. So, it was home. It was a real home.

**EB:** Has the atmosphere changed since I-94 came through?

**JP:** Honey, it's totally changed. Some people my age are still angry. 'Cause we were promised--I was gone, I come back a couple times for visits, 'cause I had a cousin here, that were still here, and several friends. And the air is totally different. And like I said, they're angry. Several of them, never were paid for their homes. They came and took their homes. One man was still in it. He totally refused. And like I said, we'd been promised. None of it's come about. And it won't.

**EB:** Thank you so much for sharing.

**JP:** Thank you, I really appreciate you.