

Rudolph Dean

Interviewer: When and where were you born?

Rudolph: I was born, umm, in a small town just north of Mobile, Alabama. Mount Vernon, Alabama in 1937, April of 1937. So, that's about 68 years ago.

Interviewer: Now when and why did you come to Waterloo?

Rudolph: Well, looking for work. I heard that, I heard that, uh, John Deer was hirin'. And, uh, basically I came here lookin' for work. And that was, uh, 1960.

Interviewer: So, um, so you're, you come, so you're workin' at John Deer. Wh- what was the connection, how'd you know, how did you learn about Waterloo? Cuz here you are from the South, you're a southerner, truly a Southerner.

Rudolph: Yes.

Interviewer: How is it you learnt about Waterloo?

Rudolph: I had a friend, Herbert Hill, that was, uh, livin' here. He come to Waterloo because his wife had an aunt that was livin' here. So and that's basically how people got to Waterloo. So through, uh, Hill I had a chance to come. Actually he brought me to Waterloo. Umm hmm.

Interviewer: But then when you get here you apply for a position at John Deer?

Rudolph: Yes. Yes. I applied for a job at John Deer, not a position.

Interviewer: [Laughs] Ok. My. [Laughs] Ok. So where you working at? What part, what were you doin' at John Deer?

Rudolph: I started in the foundry in 1960. And went from the foundry to a packaging department. And basically stayed there the rest of my John Deer life, which was a total of 33 years.

Interviewer: What was it like working in the foundry? What, describe it for me. Describe the condition

Rudolph: In 1960, in 1960 the conditions were horrible. You could walk down the gangway and you couldn't see very far from all the dust and the smoke and all that black dust that you have to breath all the stuff. And then when you would take a shower at night, you would think, oh, and that I'm clean. You go home and lay down on the sheets and that stuff comes out of your skin. It was horrible. And a lot of people of course had lung problems from breathing that. But fortunately I got out of there after three years. So I didn't have to stay a long time. And my health deteriorate. Umm hmm.

Interviewer: So you were only there for three years, which is good. You were talkin' about lung problems there, what type of lung problems? Or any deaths?

Rudolph: Well deaths. Breathing all that dust. And, uh, and all that smoke and stuff. Inhaling all of that. It just uh.

Interviewer: Ok. Being in that stuff, excuse me, for eight hours or more.

Rudolph: Oh, it was, it was awful.

Interviewer: It definitely leads to long-term effects.

Rudolph: Your face is all covered with the sand and dirt, you know. Ah, it was bad.

Interviewer: Now, what was, look at the employee that was workin' at the foundry. What percentage of blacks were working at the foundry. Rough percentage.

Rudolph: Ok. Rough percentage. I supposen', and I don't know this I don't have any real number on it. But, uh, I would say 90% of it were blacks. Most of the blacks, when they were hired they were sent right to the foundry.

Interviewer: [laughs] Ok. There's another side of you I want to talk about. And I'm glad you came to Waterloo. Umm. Let's talk about the church you belong to, Mount Carmel Church. How did you go about selecting Mount Carmel church to be your spiritual home? Tell me about that.

Rudolph: Well, uh after comin' to Waterloo, uh, I wasn't really thinkin' about church but every time I would call my mother, or she would write, the first question was, "Are you in church yet?" And you know, I kept tellin' her no, no. And, finally, Mrs. Hill told me, "Well, I hear there is a new preacher in town and he pastors this Mount Carmel Baptist church." At the time the church was at 202 Sumner Street. So I decided to go there and check this preacher out. And of course, I liked what I saw and heard and a few weeks later I joined Mount Carmel.

Interviewer: You talk about this preacher, this new preacher in town. What's this preacher?

Rudolph: That was Reverend R.S. Rucket. He was, he had just started pasturin' in Mount Carmel in, I think in July of 1960 and this was about October of 1960 that I joined the church.

Interviewer: Ok now, you talk about. Ok. You come to the church, the church is at 202

Rudolph: Sumner Street.

Interviewer: Sumner Street. Ok. This was in what year?

Rudolph: 1960.

Interviewer: It was 1960, your mother tells you to go to church.

Rudolph: Yes. Yes. I grew up in church in Mount Vernon and we were a very close knit family. Well, as a child growin' up you had to go to church. So, uh, her concern after I left home. And I think that most people think, "well as soon as I get away from mom and dad you know I'll do what I want to do." So she kept askin' and she kept writing, "Are you in church yet" So, you hate to keep lyin' to her, so you start doin'. And at first it was once in a while, you know.

Interviewer: I know you talk about this R.S. Rucket. Slyvanis.

Rudolph: Richard Slyvanis Rucket

Interviewer: Richard Slyvanis Rucket. Obviously a very powerful guy.

Rudolph: Very, very powerful.

Interviewer: Cuz he motivates you to go to church. Right, you said you were listening to him.

Rudolph: yes.

Interviewer: Tell me some of his qualities. What made him who he was. What made him stand out from other preachers?

Rudolph: Number one, he was a larger man. And, uh, he was very truthful in his talk and if he talked to ya, he would tell it just exactly like it was. You know. He didn't uh, as the old sayin', goes "beat around the bush" He came straight at ya. And uh, He was just a dynamic preacher. A fantastic preacher and a man that could do thing, you know.

Interviewer: You say do things, what types of things did he do with the community, with the people or members of the church?

Rudolph: Well, one of the things he focused on was building a new parsonage and a new church. Because he asked us if we really wanted to do it. And of course, we said yes. So, his focus, and he helped people in the community, he done a lot of things to help people, or, uh, to give to people. But at that time the money wasn't really flowing like it is now or like it did later on. But uh, he was a man that cared for not only his church but for people, his community.

Interviewer: You talk about the church specifically, tell us how he would lead the church for its fund raiser to relocate.

Rudolph: We started raisin' money to build a new church. That was through people's donations. Also through cookin' and dinners, and sellin' dinners. Or whatever programs we could put on that was fundraisers. And finally we built a parsonage first. Which you've seen that parsonage?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Rudolph: And uh, then we kept saving money, kept tryin', kept workin' to where we could build a church. And then it happened. We were able to start on Mount Carmel Church. And, uh, it was a very joyous time.

Interviewer: How long did it take to get to that point? How many years did it take to fundraise to relocate?

Rudolph: Well, from 1960 when he started. The church was built in '69. So about nine years. And you can imagine tryin' to raise money and hold, keep the people satisfied. All of the talk about "their not gonna do this, and their not gonna do that." You know, then April 19, 1969. We left the old church at 202 Sumner and marched up the hill to the new Mount Carmel. What a day. That was a joyous day.

Interviewer: Nine years of hard work.

Rudolph: Absolutely.

Interviewer: He sounds like a very powerful man.

Rudolph: Yes, yes he was.

Interviewer: A very powerful man to lead the church into a new church. In fact, a much larger one, a much better one. How long will he be at the church before he would go into retirement?

Rudolph: Well, this was 1969 he started here in 1960 and retired in '74. But his health had started to deteriorate. He was an older person, and his health started to deteriorate. So after we went into church in 1969, he wanted to get the church paid for as quickly as he possibly could. So at this time everybody was happy. And when people see something new they work pretty hard. So 1969 to 1974 we really worked hard. August of 1974 we paid the final payment of the church.

Interviewer: 1974. Again another joyous occasion.

Rudolph: Oh yes, yes. Very, very joyous.

Interviewer: What was the mood of the people? I mean, here you are you just relocated and not even five years later you would have paid off the mortgage of the church.

Rudolph: Sure. That was very joyous. Everybody was happy. I mean this was almost unheard of. I mean you could build a church and five years later pay for it. A church like that. Everybody was happy. It was a very, very joyous occasion.

Interviewer: So, he was definitely a go-getter when you talk about his leadership.

Rudolph: yes yes.

Interviewer: So he would be there for about fifteen years with the church. And obviously it sounds like he would do a lot in that fifteen years for the church and for the community.

Rudolph: yes, yes.

Interviewer: What was it like when retirement hit for him? Who would replace him? Obviously, it seems like he's irreplaceable in a sense.

Rudolph: And that's basically what we thought and everybody else thought. Uh, he, his health started to fail and he talked to us and I remember him sayin' "Brother, if you take this young man, and he was talkin' about Reverend T.F. Thomas, the present pastor, he said, "If you would take this young man, and make him your pastor, he will do greater things than I've done" And well, who believed that? Here comes a man that had built a church, built a parsonage, and got it paid for. And then he's sayin, "Take this young man and he'll do greater things than I. But you know, son, just believin' in him, is believing that he had led us and done the right thing for us. So here comes a critical point that where we must believe that he will continue to lead us by giving us, by having somebody that he thought, and he told us, he said, "God has shown me that this young man will do a good job." And, uh, of course like I said you have to believe that, and we did. So therefore,

Interviewer: You accepted it.

Rudolph: We accepted it.

Interviewer: You did. It's interesting because here it is, I mean, you have the figure head of the church, the leader of the church. And its always hard, change is always hard, but here he is telling you, that this guy is going to do bigger things, greater things than I have. You're already impressed with the record. Tell me more about this guy, Reverend Thomas, what were some of his strong qualities as a pastor and a leader.

Rudolph: He, first of all, his umm, his I guess you could use the word, attitude about church is unusual, and unusual in the sense that his whole care is for the church and his people. And actually, and maybe I should have said it first, he is a man that has truly been born again, called by God to preach. I, uh, said earlier, when we first looked at him, everybody has some little doubt. We come in mind a powerful man like Doctor Rucket is

this young, early upstart, I don't recall exactly how many years he'd been preachin'. But then, there was this big question mark, but he soon erased all of that. As he started to lead us into Mount Village one then Mount Village two. Then all of the other things he had done, the fundraisers, the helpin' people. He's a very kind, gentle person. And as I stated before, a man that I believe, like Doctor Rucket, truly called by God to lead his people.

Interviewer: Now, you said, you talked about Mount Village. What is Mount Village and why is it important?

Rudolph: Well, it was, uh, for the elders and handicapped. IT was important because at that time there wasn't much housin' for elders and handicapped people. And at that time we thought it would be a great thing to do for the community. In fact, it is a great thing. So that's why, they were so important to build, Mount Village One and years later, Mount Village Two.

Interviewer: Now you talk about, because here now you have new leadership, now we are talking about some of the things he was involved with as far as with leading the church. Now you have a gentlemen who comes in and he helps with his leadership, along with the church, the support of the church, with people like yourself, who comes along and builds some basically for the community, specifically for the community. This is incredible.

Rudolph: Yes it is. And here goes back, made us think back on what Dr. Ruckett had said, that this young man would do greater things than he was able to do.

Interviewer: This is a great thing.

Rudolph: Yes. Yes.

Interviewer: I am definitely impressed because you don't hear about a lot churches that are able to accomplish was a great feat. When you are talking about building shelter, quality shelter, in fact. Because you built, excuse me you said, Mount Village One and Mount Village Two. So you built two sets. Two different sets.

Rudolph: Yes. Two different sets.

Interviewer: Tell me about that. Tell me about the process of building. What it was like when it was finished.

Rudolph: Well. In 1980, if you can envision, it was really, really, really hard getting everything all lined up. And of course, that's hard, two housing. You had some many guidelines that you had to follow. Then you had, we had such a hassle with the, if I can use the word, with the city trying to get everything lined up. And it wasn't easy. But again, when I look back at it, it was nothing but the grace of God. That's the way I have to sum it up.

Interviewer: With the one and then the two, with the one and then the two. What was the reaction of some the residents that moved into their new homes?

Rudolph: They loved it. They still love it. You know, being able to move into a uh place like that, in fact, I'd be there myself if I could.

Interviewer: Ok. All right.

Rudolph: I can not go there. But if I could.

Interviewer: If you could.

Rudolph: Yes.

Interviewer: That says a lot about the craftsmanship and the work of the housing. Mount Village one and two.

Rudolph: Yes, right.

Interviewer: Now I know you guys were involved really with a lot of community outreach, a lot, I mean guys were really was a busy church, excuse me, still are a very busy church with helping the people. Not only within the church but those that want to be a part or if you can help them any way. Lets talk about one of the programs that I know that you guys had at one time, that was very effective. In fact the Courier has an article on the program, it was an education program. And that article is titled, Church Run Saturday School Tutors Kids in the Basics" Excuse me. "Church Run Saturday School Tutors Kids in the Basics. Tell me about this program and how did you guys got it started and what it took to keep it goin'.

Rudolph: Well, the need to help children succeed. That was the general thought. And, umm, and we thought. Let us do what we can to help the younger people. And I wish that I had had that thing when I was comin' along. Perhaps would've made a better student out of me. So that's why it was put together. Just to be able to help, I can remember one of my younger brothers that would sit for hours and hours in that there tutorin' those children. And others, of course, not only him. But there was others that umm, trying to help the children succeed. And I guess that was basically the focus is tryin' to help children succeed and it didn't have to be only Mount Carmel children. But uh, you know.

Interviewer: Because I know that you reached out to the kids from a nearby school, Roosevelt. Let me ask, you had students coming from a variety of schools?

Rudolph: Yes. Yes. From different schools. Yes. It wasn't only for, like I said, for Mount Carmel. It was a great program but somewhere along the line we didn't do it as often as we should. But it was a great program and it helped a tremendous amount of children.

Interviewer: Good. And also, along with that program you guys do a lot of things informally, spur of the moment. If the need arises you will if you can find within yourself do what you can to help a person and a people.

Rudolph: Yes. Yes. Absolutely. And a lot of things are not written down. The people the church has helped. People that come by and say can you help me with this. Not necessarily money all the time. That there is a perhaps a word to inspire somebody. But there is a lot of things the church is continuing to do.

Interviewer: I know, for example, the Courier got wind of another one of you guy's outreach programs, not necessarily a program, but you fulfilled a need. The title of the article is Church Sets Fundraiser for Ill Girl.

Rudolph: Yes. That was a young lady and her baby was sick. And they need I can not remember, maybe it was a liver transplant, I'm not sure. But, uh, we put this fundraiser on to help her. You know. The church is supposed to feel the need of people. You know. The people of the church and the people of the city, regardless of who they are. And that's what Reverend Thomas and Mount Carmel has been about for many years.

Interviewer: And that's what I think is important, what's unique about Mount Carmel and other churches that mimic or you know have the same type of behavior as far as outreach because there's more that people can benefit from a church than being a spiritual home, of course that is the focus, is getting your spiritual food. But there is more to church that people aren't aware of. What the church does for the community. This is just one of them.

Rudolph: Absolutely. Because we go to the church, as we say, as we know it, to get that spiritual food, but we go out to serve. There's a lot of things that we can do in the community after we come and find out what to do first, we got to come and find out what to do. And after you find out what to do you go out and do it. And basically, that how the church is set up.

Interviewer: This is good because, again, I'm very impressed with all the things you guys do in the way of outreach, your community involvement. How you reach out to the people. In fact, I know there is another article in the Courier headed, "Service will Celebrate Emancipation of Slaves" Now this is something that is not religiously focused, but yet it is very important. Tell me about this article and why you guys have this celebration or acknowledge this.

Rudolph: Well, when Reverend Rucket was here we started the Emancipation Proclamation Celebration the first of January every year. And when Pastor Thomas come in we kept it goin'. So, uh for, I can't tell you how many years, forty some years we've been having that program. It's to, basically, make the younger people especially aware of what the Emancipation Proclamation was, what happened. We do traditional dress and traditional food after the program. Just to make people aware of what happened back when.

Interviewer: So you take a day, you guys are dressing in, you say traditional. African garb, .....

Rudolph: Yes. Yes. And, and, and, basically not all that but overalls and jumpers and

Interviewer: This is good so now you talking about the slaves. So you talk a little bit about both. This is good.

Rudolph: We talk about what happened to our people, not only comin' over from Africa, but more importantly is what happened here. How did they survive? Here after they got here. Had they not survived then I would not be here. Whatever lineage I come from. So, its important that people know that and see you basically, we put a lot of emphasis on getting our young people here so that they can hear that. And even some of the old slave songs they used to sing. I mean, if you don't hear them, you soon forget them.

Interviewer: Very true. Very true. Now you talked about the children, cuz the focus is definitely the children here. What are some of their reactions. Here we have this celebration and this recognition acknowledging this historical moment, this time in our past. What were some of their reactions? Because I know that they have to feel distance from slavery and things like this. What were some of their reactions to it?

Rudolph: Disbelief was a lot of their reaction. How could this actually happen. And when I say that I don't mean disbelief that things like this could really actually happen. But what I think has happened around Mount Caramel people has heard it so much that it's a little different from just bringing people in to one or two programs. But most of our kids have grown up with it, like my youngest son which is 28 years old, he's heard it all of his life. So you wouldn't get that reaction from him. But young people's that is coming in is like, "What, did this happen, man I can believe that happened!" But it did.

Interviewer: That brings me to my next question, you talk about history you talk about change and being aware. And that's what this is all about, this emancipation, to make sure the members of the church are aware. Let's talk about some of the political awareness you bring to the church. And again, I know you are not focused on politics and things like that. And again, there is an effort made by the church to make sure that the people are politically aware.

Rudolph: Yes, right. Well what happens there are people that are running for whatever office. Well, there's uh, there's presidents, vice presidents, senator. There's always somebody coming wanting to make a speech. And we allow that. You gotta find or steer people to the right person or listen to the right person. You can't make up their mind. But we don't actively go out, uh, doing things, "You need to vote this person, or you need to do that, or you need to do that." We don't actually do that. But we listen.

Interviewer: Right, ok, I see. Because, in fact, I know you had a number of distinguished and reputable politicians come to the church and speak. For instance, Jessie Jackson.

Rudolph: Yes. Yes.

Interviewer: What was it like having him come to the church and how did the people react to him?

Rudolph: Oh it was great 'cause he was really loved, a person that's loved by the nation. And it was just great. It was excitin' just seein' him. You know, yeah. Yeah. People was very excited.

Interviewer: And what was your reaction? The people were excited, but I'm questioning you.

Rudolph: I was excited too. [laugh] I was excited to see him. You know, and to be able to, I was able to go up and shake his hand. You know, so that was an excitin' time.

Interviewer: And along with him, I know that you've had Vilsack? Governor Vilsack.

Rudolph: Yes. Governor Vilsack was there, I think last year. Nussle was there. Neagle. And many, many others which I can't even remember over the years. But, uh, as I said before the church doesn't actively get involved in politics.

Interviewer: Ok. This is just, this is just a stage or forum for the politicians to come and express their views and you guys will just hear them out.

Rudolph: Yes. Yes. Years gone past people would come and after they were elected you wouldn't see them anymore. But, uh, here recently, the past few years, there are several people that, uh, elected and they come back to the church. They say, "Hey I wanted to come back and say thank you."

Interviewer: Ok. Now, here we've talked a lot about the church and all that you've done in the community. Things like that. All very good, very effective. Tell us a little bit about your role in the church and what do you do, what are some of your major responsibilities. I know you like to cook, so you know we have to talk about that.

Rudolph: Yeah. Well, I am a deacon board. I became a deacon the third of September 1967. So that's quite a few years. I'm on the deacon board and I'm a part of the choir, been choir president for many years. And of course, a Sunday school teacher. Assistant Superintendent of Sunday school. And then I like to cook. That is my number one thing.

Interviewer: Ok. So you is like the head cook for fundraisers, banquets.

Rudolph: Funderaisers. Banquets. Whatever we do around the church. We, we, we, I try to be a part of it. Mount Carmel has some excellent cooks and I feel blessed just to be a part of it. And I try to do all that I possibly can to help with the upkeep of the church. And the upkeep, the raisin' of God's kingdom. I mean, even through food. You know.

You see if you get a person full, if that person's not hungry you can tell them something. And of course we do a lot of cooking and eating, fundraisin' there at the church.

Interviewer: Could you tell me about, probably, probably the most important meal you think you've cooked for the church. Could you tell me about the most important meal. I know there are many. I'm quite sure there are many important meals you feel you've cooked. But which one comes to mind as far as the most important meal you've had to cook, as far as the church is concerned.

Rudolph: Probably, when I feed families after a funeral. Usually, when somebody pass away, then that family. I think that is very important and that's just my thinking because you are helping people to get over their grief. You know, not to say that the fundraisers, 'cause the fundraisers are very, very important. You know.

Interviewer: No, yeah absolutely. That was a tough question.

Rudolph: Yes it was.

Interviewer: And that was a good response. It never crossed my mind. Food is important and people, it is a tradition to eat after the funeral services and sometimes before. I think that's a noble thing. That's what you do is important and I respect it. Lets talk a little bit about.

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