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Pearson, Minister Charlie E.

Charlie E. Pearson

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Minister Pearson

Unknown Date, 2013

Interviewers: Debbie Frost, Deborah Oden, David Slutsky, Unknown Interviewer

MP: Walking to school, let me tell you about school for a minute. We talk about private schools here, and uh, I want my kid to go to a private school, I want my kid in private school. Did you know that the first school I went to was a private school. It was a three-room private school in a churchyard. The church, it was named Mount Chapel Elementary school, and they taught, uh well it was Mount Chapel School, they didn't call it an elementary school. Because number one they taught from the first to the eighth grade or something there, in those three rooms. See, we went to class and like I said, I walked three miles to school. And when we got there, uh, the kids in my, my age, you know the first graders. We went in and we went to class, we had reading writing and arithmetic. And for the rest of the day we were out in the yard. And the lady that lived next door she was like the uh, I guess she mean, what do you call the people that walks the hall and now... Monitor, she was like the monitor. Kid's monitor. Cause she made sure we behaved out there in the yard. She uh, her husband was the, custodian, her and her husband was the custodian of the school, he cut the woods so that we had wood to be warm by. But uh, what I took to school for lunch during the wintertimes, was my mother used to can peach and pears, and they were not pint jars, they were half pints. And I would go to school with a biscuit and a half pint of peach. That was my lunch. I, the sweetest peaches you wanna taste on this earth. And that was my lunch. We didn't have cafeterias, it was a private school and that's all we had. We walked back home and we didn't come home hungry. Because you had plum trees, you had apple trees, all over the place. You know. And here in the apple trees, the pear trees you know, beside the fields. No one complained about a child picking up a pear, or pulling off a pear and going on by. We just didn't go and butcher it up and beat it up and carry, we just picked a pear and went on, nobody said anything. So when you got home in the afternoon you were really full of fruits, you know. To ate along the way and then you come home. You come home, you know, you pull off your shoes, you know and in the summer time, in the springtime, I didn't wear any shoes until I went to school. Only had the one pair. I went to church, I had one pair of shoes for church, and I had one pair of shoes for school and other activities. My Sunday clothes consisted of one pair of black pants and one white shirt. And it was white because my mother made sure that it was white, that it was pressed to the max. And the pants had a crease in it that could cut a fly wing off [everyone laughs]. That's what I had, you know. And I didn't feel poor, you know. I didn't even know what poor was. Because I had three squares if I wanted. Uh, I had, you know, with a pair, one pair of shoes, you know. I just loved walking barefoot, you know. There was't nothing at that time, you know. Going to the gym to get some exercise, I didn't need that. Because I walked behind a mule all day long [everyone laughs] so I had exercise, you know what I mean? So I was in good shape, you know what I mean? And oson, I mean you walk behind a mule all day long, you are in good shape. You can best believe that, you know? And uh, so uh, I didn't know what poor was because the people next to me, same thing. You know, we all did things together. So I know about, you know you talk about hard times, they call it hard times I know about hard times. So you know. Uh, and uh, stuff about I don't want that, and I don't want that. If my mother cook a meal, put it on the table. You didn't have to eat it tonight, you didn't have to. She wasn't gonna argue with you. But come morning when everybody else is getting grits, eggs, and a piece of ham, you ate that food that you didn't want last night. And then she said now, you gonna have to catch up. You're gonna have to catch up. So you ate it. You know what I'm saying? So now if you ate that, now lunchtime came tomorrow, you got a chance to eat what everybody ate for lunch. But if you got to poppin' and didn't eat all what you had

this morning, it was sitting there waitin' on you for lunch. You were gonna eat your food, you know you didn't throw nothing away back then, no. Uh, but we didn't, like I said I wasn't hungry because my, we had cows, we had chickens, we had hogs, and whatever, so anytime we wanted uh, uh, milk we had milk because we had the cow, and uh, uh, refrigerator, we didn't have a refrigerator, we had what you'd call an icebox. That's with the sawdust in it and a hunk of ice, and you set, the milk was in there, we didn't buy milk or butter because churned our own cream, you know, shook that cream until it became butter. OK? We cooked with the, we didn't throw that away because momma would love to make buttermilk biscuits, and we, my I don't know how my grandmother and my uncle and aunt and those knew that we had churned butter. But the next morning my mother always made buttermilk biscuits. And you could rest assured my grandmother and my uncle and them would be there that morning. After they'd be churning that butter. And I still don't know how it is today that they knew, you know. But they would come to get the buttermilk biscuits, so they, we didn't waste that either, you know? It was very little wasted. Very little wasted, you know we could go fishing and do whatever, like I said my father was a sharecropper, but I didn't know what poor is, You know, was. Now I joke about it, you know. I tell people y'all said when you was poor, I start looking for money. You know, uh, my grandfather got in trouble. He borrowed something and couldn't get it back, so they took everything from him, including the oh our awful poor and left us poor. [Everyone laughs]

So, you don't know what poor is. Lemme educate you, about poor. You know, so uh, you know, we had, and I didn't know what racism was either. And until, I knew there was a difference, you know. Living. Because of the sharecropping and the thing that went on with my father, you know, and the owner of the farm. But other than that, there was, there was very little stuff there about that. Because there were white kids, we, my mother kept white kids, and we all lay down and slept on the same pad on the porch. Alright? We ate out the same plate, you know. As kids, I can remember, you know, I can remember biting off Jay's biscuit and he's biting off of mine. We're playing, you know, and it was nothing. And he was white, you know? Uh, Jay and I grew up, and Jay was like my brother. If you did something to Jay you did it to me. Now I learned what really racism was, I went to the city. And that's when I first found out what really racism is about, you know.

DO: Was that the city within the state that you grew up in?

MP: No, I got, I mean you gotta realize is I was, seventeen years old? I was, went to Miama, found out what that was about, and then when I went in the military I really found out what it was all about, you know, racism. And I didn't understand that at first. Why people would hate each other? Just, you know. I couldn't figure it out. Then I found out what it was. It's a word called ignorance. Ignorance is a bad thing, you know.

Unknown: Do you remember what year you went into the service?

MP: 1963.

Unknown: 1963.

MP: That was, let me see, that was the, that was the year of the flower children and uh, what do you call it? Uh, the yip, the hippies and all that stuff? That was the time of the hippies. That was the time of Angela Davis and Stokely Carmichael, all those.

DF: Civil Rights Movement.

MP: Right. Black panthers and all that. Uh, and uh, I got to Columbus, Ohio. I was in Texas, that's where I did my basic training. And I saw racism there, but I saw racism on three different levels. Ok? Uh, there was racism when it came to blacks and whites. And then there was another racism when it came to whites and hispanics, OK? Um, the term that uh, I'll say it explicitly because I'm not afraid of who I am, I know who I am and I'm satisfied, but I'll use the term explicitly what they said. Um, uh, they mexicans were called wetbacks, which was a derogatory term when it came to them, and we were called, you know, n-----. And um, so, there's we have the three levels of racism, OK? And then the women, you had the wetbacks, the males who are less than the whites, and then the women was less than nothing. You know? You know, it's being honest. That's the way it was, you know? Even still on the books on South Carolina today, blacks are three quarters of a man. Still.

DO: In South Carolina books.

MP: Books.

DO: Hmm.

MP: Believe you me, it is utilized. But in a very sneaky way.

DO: For example.

MP: When they're looking for numbers, OK, when they're looking for numbers in order to do something, OK? Well, in order for it to be skewed in the favor of the white, they count you still as three quarters of a man. Therefor you do not come up to the number of whites.

DF: Mm hmm.

MP: They don't tell you that.

DF: Mm hmm.

MP: But that's how it's counted. Ok. Behind closed doors. Ok? So we still have some, we still have a long way to go, OK? Not, now don't get me wrong, I also tell people all good people ain't white, and all bad people ain't black. You know. You got a mixture of all. There's some black folk I wouldn't want to meet in an alley. And I, I forgot your name.

DS: David.

MP: David. David have never met a white man. I promise you he have never met a real white man. Because if he did, he'd better be in the ghetto. Take my word for it. And I have never met a truly black man, uh, what's that guy over there? Looking for? Joseph Kony? Joseph Kony is a black man. Now that's a *real* black man. OK?

DO: Mm hmm.

MP: That's all I'm trying to tell you. George, uh, George Wallace was a white man, *real* white man. Those folk, that's just what I mean. When you meet one, you come away bruised even if he didn't hit you.

DO: OK.

MP: Your spirit was bruised by listening, looking at a person like that. You know what I mean? But me, um, uh, like I said, growing up like that, walking to school and whatever, I remember when my father got the first car. Boy, I thought I was in heaven. No mule and wagon to go to the store no more. Get in the car and go to the store and ride to church, you know? We walked to church, or we the person who was on the mule and you know, going to church. Uh, church, boy that was a thing for me uh, uh, you have the Praise Houses here. Uh, we didn't have Praise Houses as per se. But we had gatherings at the houses, you know. Uh, and when they rehearsed, they rehearsed in the fields.

DO: Really.

MP: Yeah.

DO: What was that like, to hear?

MP: Singing and working, it was kinda soothing. You know. Made things go by easier. Yeah. Uh, uh, when things were a little bit rough, uh, there was a song that they sang in the field, I'll never forget that one that, you know... send down your rain. Send Down Your Rain. Send down your latter rains, you know.

DO: Mm.

MP: Which was, there's joy in your rains. There's joy in your rains. There's joy in your latter rains. Uh, you know. That one stuck with me, and I sang this one sometimes even today when I get uh, I get a little burden sometimes, or some of the things that goes on in this world, I said, these burdens are there. Gets mighty rough sometimes, these burdens are there gets mighty rough sometimes. Uh, but when Jesus said that he would meet me over in Galilee, but that tells me that if he met me in Galilee he'll meet me here. When I finish, I'll sing a couple verses, and whatever it is, it's gone. You know? But that came out of the fields, you know. You always knew what to, what was gonna be sung on Sunday morning. Because any field that you went by, somebody was singing.

DO: And when they sang these songs, was it in the Gullah/Geechee dialect?

MP: Uh, sometimes.

DO: Or, language, should I say language.

MP: Sometimes. Some of the words would be, you know, some of it would be. And depending who was singing it. It would be. It would be in the Geechee, um, you know. Another interesting part about this sharecropper father of mine. He only had three weeks of schooling.

DO: Three weeks.

MP: Three weeks. And he could read, and he could write, he taught himself. Uh, my father was ninety-two years old when I found out that he could sign. I didn't know he could sign! I was at the house and I knew that this guy that passed by was deaf, you know. And um, I had seen him standing there with my father, and I said I wonder what, you know, I guess he'd just stopped, you know, just to have a place to stop and my father must've given him something. And one day, I see him standing by the, what's the road, just little walk away from the road. And I seen him signing, and I look, and there's my father signing. And I'm saying to myself, I say you think you're smart, and you can't even sign. And here my father's signing and talking to somebody and I didn't even know he could do it. And how did he learn? In the lumber yard, they had signs, they had to use sign in order to talk to someone over the saws, they couldn't yell it because the saw was too loud. So they learned to sign in the lumberyard. And so he brought that with him, and he just kept on doing it with that deaf-mute, until he signed with him, have a conversation with him and I didn't even know it. So he wasn't dumb after all was he?

DO: Not at all.

MP: You know, he what I couldn't do, you know? No, he raised me. And that, I look back and I know that was a challenge too, you know, at one point in time, I never gave him any trouble, you know. My mother was a disciplinarian, you know. My father only got ahold of me one time, and that was enough for me. [Everyone laughs]. No more of that, you know. But my mother, I mean, it was just, my mother says, if one of you did it, all of you did it. So she'd whip everybody.

DF: How is living here on the Sea Islands now different or alike where you grew up?

MP: No, no. Just that they uh, I guess here we still have this secret thing, there's a secret, seems to be some sort of secrecy. And you know, you're trying to keep a secret but everybody already know. You know. There is no secret anymore, so why are you trying to protect a secret that's not a secret, you know? Um, you talk about it, you know. Or you go write about it about it. If you don't write about it, then somebody else is gonna write about it and profit from it. Uh, uh, I'm a pretty good cook too, you know they cook good here on this island. I can cook good too, and I came from a place, they call the part here, they call it Frogmore stew, we call it potluck over on the other side of the river.

DF: Same food.

MP: Same food. And we used to get, when they got together, you know doing the quilting. See, we didn't buy blankets and stuff. My mother and them made quilts, you know from cotton from the field, they'd take all the seeds out of it, or they'd buy some, but most of the time they sat there and they pulled the seeds out of the cotton, and they got scraps, rags and whatever, and they made blankets. And the potluck stew, this person would, they made blankets for two, three weeks. During the harsh wintertimes, see. They spread that stuff on that table, you know, in the house you'd have room, and they'd just move everything to the side and then sit there making them. And everybody brought something. You know. This person might bring a piece of beef, this person bring chicken, some chicken. You know. Bring pork, the other bring tomatoes, the other bring corn, and all that, so they all got together and just threw it all into one pot. Shrimp, fish, you know. It's called Frogmore Stew. Same thing. And we call it potluck, they call it Frogmore. Because of the area. But Frogmore stew is no different from ours. Uh, the seasonings that they use here, originally, we used the same things. We didn't buy onions, ok. My father called them shallots, Onions, because it was almost like garlic, you know when you put it up it had all the, you know like a garlic has all the little pieces in it, the little, you know, cloves of garlic in there? The shallots onion was similar to that, you know. Had a lot of balls on the one onion, the little small one. And they're very strong in season, you know they'll season the pot very good. You know, uh. Pepper, we grew pepper. I remember my father had some green pepper, and uh, his friend told him that he'd eat hot food. There was nothing too hot for him, he'd eat the hottest thing there is, and my father didn't have nothing too hot. Alright. Well let me tell ya. Let me tell ya. He says, OK, my father used to make, you know the stuff they use on the table now, like collard greens and vinegar, pepper, you know.

DF: Chow chow?

MP: Yeah, they shake that... what do y'all call it?

DF: Chow chow.

MP: Chow chow?

DO: You know the chow chow with the hot peppers?

MP: With that vinegar in them.

DO: With vinegar

DF: Yes.

MP: Yeah, well, uh, my father made a jar for him, ok. And uh, he took it home, and the next day he brought it back. And told my father it's a sin to have anything this hot. So he didn't want it, nor did he want anything out of my father's field, ever again. Because he couldn't take it. So hot.. You could actually, my father had to get rid of those. You know, he couldn't even use them. You know, you could walk through the field, I mean you could pop it, your eyes got to burning. Mm hhm. It was worse than habaneros. I don't know what they was. I can eat a piece of habanero sometime, but I couldn't eat them. No sirree. But my father grew em. And uh, uh, a guy got some of the seeds and he didn't know you had to

cut his down, he didn't want it, you know he didn't want it, he couldn't handle it. You know. But my father grew it. He grew all kinds of stuff, you know where you got those seeds from or how he did it, to cause them to be that hot, I have no idea. But he could grow em. You know? Uh, But uh, other stuff, like we used to do, uh, we had the uh, nowadays you can get sweet potato fries from the store?

DO: Mm hmm.

MP: We was eatin' french, we was eatin' sweet potato uh fries from ever since I can remember. And french fries, my father was making french fries. You know, we used to make potato chips. Uh, we use to make cracklin, you know, for the winter? Bread, you know, you ever eat a cracklin' cornbread? That is delicious, you know you get a hot sweet potato, you know throw it in the fireplace and uh, bake it right in the fireplace, take it right out of there and eat your piece of cornbread and cracklin. Cracklin, cornbread and a sweet potato is unbelievable good, goodness. So. Uh. What we buy today we never, and then on the other hand, you know, there used to be plum trees from one end of coffin point to the other. But the city has sprayed them and kill 'em.

DF: What?

MP: Mm hmm. There are very little plum trees along these roads anymore. Uh, and the reason for that I guess maybe they don't want you buying, if they could keep you from getting, having it, then you had to go to the store to buy it, you know. And, you know. So uh, uh a lot of things that we buy today we didn't have to buy then, you know. A lot of things that they, that uh, many people in the north didn't know about, we were eating it, you know. Did you know that cauliflower and uh, it's cauliflower and uh broccoli. Have you ever eaten the flower before?

DO: Yeah.

MP: Have you ever eaten the flower before?

DF: Somewhere in California by a native american reservation, they were telling us which flower we could eat.

MP: Number one you eat flowers all the time.

DO: OK.

MP: Cauliflower. Broccoli is a flower. OK? We used to eat 'em, and they became a vegetable [everyone laughs]. Sure.

DF: Yes sir.

MP: You know, once they get in the field and became commercialized, they became a vegetable. [Laughs] When you go to the store and eat the cabbage, you know the red cabbage and all that, that was a flower! Many places you go now people had those planted around the house and it was beautiful! You get

the white and the red and all that, the purple and all that. But they're flowers. And nowadays you eat them. Mm hmm. Once they hit the field and somebody started selling them to you, they started calling them vegetables. But we ate em. You know? It was nothing to pick up a, you know, a piece of broccoli and whatever, you just eat it. You know, why shouldn't you eat it? But it...

[End of Interview]