

# MY NAME IS *John Taylor*...

and I'm the grandson of Nancy Ann and Jack Taylor on my father's side and my grandfather, Jack Taylor, was a cook at the Eldridge Hotel and my grandmother, Nancy Ann, was freed from slavery. And she was released and on her way to Kansas when she got to Fort Scott, why, she learned that Quantrill had raided Lawrence. And at that time North Lawrence was a wilderness. And the people from South Lawrence and other areas hid in the underbrush there south of the bridge, where it was going up into trees. And my grandmother, Nancy Ann Taylor, on my father's side, when she came to Kansas, she came with two white girls that was fathered by her master and she was seventeen years old when she had her first child.

When she got to Kansas, she met my grandfather Jack Taylor, on my father's side, he was a cook at the Eldridge Hotel and she started working there as a dishwasher in the hotel. And then later on they were married and later on after that he became the head chef and janitor of the Lawrence Plymouth Congregational Church, which he maintained until his death which was in 1917. And to that union of my father's people there was nine children that were born. And they lived in North Lawrence all of that time. Now my mother's people, her father was a mulatto, his father was his master and he was sold at seven years old for seven hundred dollars on the block. And his real father's name was Dyer and he was sold to a man by the name of Logan and that's the name he carried until his death was David Logan. And he ran away from slavery when he was a young man and he came to Lawrence.

And on my mother's side, her mother, her aunts and uncles were born free and they lived in Kansas City, Kansas which was known as Wyandotte. And to that union there was five children born on my mother's side.

According to history on my grandparents when you come to segregation and prejudice, there was a colored man that was arrested and thrown in jail for rape and my grandparents, my grandfathers and a lot of other colored citizens watched over the city jail for a solid month and they thought everything was quiet and so they pulled away and didn't watch the jail. And that night they didn't go, this man, his name was Pete Vinegar, he was hanged by the neck until dead on the north bank of the Kaw River, which extends into North Lawrence. And later on they found out that it was a white man that had blacked his face and raped this woman instead of Pete Vinegar.

And then I come along to my time of life of prejudice and segregation. North Lawrence had no ghetto, we weren't separated off into one corner of North Lawrence, but there was a problem in our living conditions and where we could live.

And when I had three little boys, I was living in a three-room house owned by my mother and I had to expand. And then I was looking for a house, nobody would rent to me because I had three little boys and I went to some white friends of mine, the Hemphills that had rentals and selling of land and farms and I went to them and asked them if they could help me. And it's the same home where I'm living now and I said, "Thornton, I need a place to live and nobody will rent to me because I'm colored and I have three boys," I said, "Can you help me?" He says, "John, I have one house for sale in North Lawrence, it is 328 Locust Street and it's owned by Roy and Eva Busher. And it's in the hands of the Lawrence Loan Association, but I don't know how you'd get in there to see the house." I said, "Thornton, you leave that with me, I'll find a way."



So I put on--my brother was a painter, my brother Fred was a painter and I put on his white pants and cap and rule. And I went to the residence of 328 Locust Street and knocked on the door and I told the lady that was living there that I was planning on re-

decorating the house, painting outside and inside of the house.

I cashed in some insurance policies and made the down payment on the house. It was a run-down, shabby house at that time. So I worked hard and I paid for it by myself, my wife took care of the children, and then I borrowed money and remodeled it and paid all the money back and the house is free.

But still we had the segregation problem. There wasn't a place in Lawrence where a colored person could get a meal or a drugstore where he could get a soda or an ice cream except one place that was owned by a North Lawrence man named Muzzy. And he had a place on Massachusetts Street, now I believe run by Edith's Cafe, and it was just one little narrow aisle and half of it was divided. The colored people sat halfway back into the building so that they couldn't be seen by the public.

And even up until 1951 that condition still existed. And we had the flood in 1951 and we had to evacuate and go to South Lawrence. Well it was lucky that Mr. A. D. Weaver and his wife Nell invited me and my wife and little girl, she was three years old, and she wanted an ice cream soda and I went into Rankins Drug Store and I went back and asked the manager if my little girl could have an ice cream soda. He said, "Yes, they'll give you an ice cream soda, but you'll have to take it out and drink it on the outside of the building and not inside." I said, "Well, I'm very sorry, I just won't get her a soda." That was in 1951 and that condition still existed until the legislature passed a law that that no longer could happen, that was in the city of Lawrence.

And I attended the University of Kansas in 1921 and I wasn't even allowed to swim in the pool, because of my nationality. So it has been a difficult situation in my life, but still I raised a family and I enjoy Lawrence and I don't intend to live any place else as long as I live, 'cause North Lawrence is my birthplace and I love it.

Zavelo: That's a real interesting story.

T: And my grandfather was David Logan, he was a slave and he couldn't read and he couldn't write, and North Lawrence was divided up into two wards, fifth ward and sixth ward and he lived in the sixth ward. And some of his white friends asked him to run for city councilman and he did and he beat his white opponent in a landslide. And he served on the city staff from 1910 until 1913. And he was instrumental in getting the first street lights in North Lawrence and I'm happy to be a citizen and a taxpayer of North Lawrence.

Z: There was another colored man on the city council around that time, I believe, whose name was Fred West.

T: Yes, Fred West was the principal of Old Lincoln School at Seventh and Lincoln when I attended school. And my aunt, that was my grandmother Nancy Ann Taylor, was her daughter and she was a teacher under Fred West. And my father, her brother was her pupil and she taught there a number of years and then she left and went to Topeka and went to Northwestern University and graduated, she majored in Spanish. And she married a colored man that was identical Spaniard, and they had two children, a boy named Dean and a girl named Coreen. And they left Topeka because of the prejudices and they didn't want their children to come up under those conditions so they went to Buenos Aires, South America to live. And when they got to New York and was chartering a boat to go to South America, it was the Titanic. Now they were white enough that they could pass to be white, but there was just something about her conscience that she couldn't betray her heritage and so she and her husband canceled the trip on the Titanic and they took another boat to go to Europe. And as you know, the Titanic sunk and they were saved. And my aunt and uncle and two children gave up their United States and lived and died in South America.

Z: You were born in Lawrence in 1900, right?

T: In North Lawrence, I was born in 1899.

Z: And, did you have any brothers or sisters?

T: Yes, I had five brothers and one sister.

Z: And what type of work did your father do?

T: Well, at first he did ordinary labor and in some of that labor he would cut across the river and they would saw ice. They had ice houses, they were blocked for summer use and was packed in sawdust. And he did that for years and he did other manual labor and then later on when I was just beginning to

be about ten years old, he took the examination and he was a brakeman on the Union Pacific, on the passenger train, oh, for thirty-some years. And then after that he retired and then he did farming until he was eighty years old. And then after that he just lived a private life.

Z: Where was his farm?

T: It was in North Lawrence here, it was just the end of North Eighth Street, it wasn't a big stretch, but--and then while he did that mostly in order to have something for us three boys to do. He didn't want us to be idle and he laid out a schedule for us to do and he also had hogs, horses, and cows to keep us busy.

Z: What did he grow?

T: Oh, corn, vegetables.

Z: Where was your first house in Lawrence, when you were just a small boy?

T: Well, I was born in a one room house on a two acre plot and my father was gone up at the ice house cutting ice and I was born with my mother alone at eleven o'clock in the morning. And my mother put me in a pillow slip until my father came home at four o'clock. My oldest brother was with my grandmother and just before my grandmother came down to the house, my Uncle Albert said, "Mama, Arabella may be sick, I think we should go up there and see her," and when they got up there they found that I was born and my mother was cold and I was cold. And they built a fire and my mother took over, my grandmother took over and cut the navel cord, she was a midwife and took care of me until my father got home. And in two days I developed pneumonia, I was a very fair child at that time, I sort of looked like a Spanish child. And so my grandmother went to get her neighbor, that they called Granny Delaney and so Granny came over and so my grandfather he gets on his horse and goes to town and gets Dr. E. D. Morris and he lived in the, oh I think the ten hundred block on Tennessee Street, and brought him over. And he said, "Ann," that was my grandmother on my father's side, "the baby has pneumonia and there's nothing that I can do." And so



he left and Granny said to my grandmother, which is Ann, she said, "Ann, this is too fine a baby for us to let him die and we're not going to do it." It seemed like to me that it was an unthinkable thing to do but old people had their ways of treating people with herbs, poultices and everything else. And it's the truth so I'm going to tell you. We had hogs and she went out into the hog pen and took a switch and whipped the hogs until they passed dung, and she came in with a shovel full of dung and they made a plaster from my waist clear up to my neck in hog dung and then wrapped me up in in hot blankets. And now you're looking at me; I'm still here.

Z: That's amazing.

T: Now lots of days they would say that would be a tetanus, but I guess there wasn't any at that time.

Z: Where was this house located again?

T: It was located on North Eighth Street. It was a one room house and then when I was just a small child then my father bought a house at Seventh and... a five room house. He bought that from Louis Minger and then we lived there until after the 1903 flood and then they moved up to what is now in the present