

Dr. G. Calvin McCutchen

A leading voice for racial justice and senior pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church for fifty years.

Chapter 01 - Introduction

Announcer: During the civil rights era of the 1950s and '60s, Dr. G. Calvin McCutchen established himself as a leader among black pastors, coordinating efforts locally in Tulsa in the push for desegregation. Along with the late Rev. B. S. Roberts, he helped organize youths for sit-in demonstrations at whites-only restaurants, including Borden's Cafeteria in north Tulsa and Piccadilly's downtown.

Dr. McCutchen served in the Marine Corps, then attended American Baptist Theological Seminary in Nashville and Tennessee State University. It was his first job offer out of college that brought him to Tulsa. Then three years later, on October 4, 1957, he was named pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church.

Dr. McCutchen retired in 2007 after 50 years as senior pastor. His late wife, Adelene, was one of Tulsa's first black female police officers. The couple was married 59 years until her death in 2014. Dr. McCutchen died March 30, 2019.

Listen to Dr. McCutchen talk about his early calling into the ministry, his time spent with Martin Luther King and dealing with the aftermath of the 1921 race massacre on the oral history website VoicesofOklahoma.com.

Chapter 02 - 5:32 Life in Kentucky

John Erling: My name is John Erling. Today's date is November 9, 2011.

Dr. McCutchen, if you'll state your full name, your date of birth, your present age, and where we're recording this interview.

Dr. G. Calvin McCutchen: George C. McCutchen, Sr., age eighty-four. Was born March the 1st, 1927. We're at the Mt. Zion Baptist Church, 419 North Elgin Avenue, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

JE: This room is part of—

GM: This room, yeah, the room is the boardroom of the Mt. Zion Baptist Church in the Family Life Center.

JE: And is known as the...?

GM: G. Calvin McCutchen Family Life Center.

JE: What name did you go by as a child growing up, George or Calvin?

GM: Um, George.

JE: Tell us where you were born.

GM: I was born in Warren County, Kentucky, a little community called Rockfield, near Bowling Green, Kentucky.

JE: Was that in a hospital or in a house or where was it?

GM: I was at home, I mean, very few folk were born in hospitals in that community. It was a rural community and it was at home.

JE: Did you have brothers or sisters?

GM: I have four sisters and two brothers.

JE: Your mother's name and her maiden name and where she came from?

GM: My mother's name was Rosetta Barnett. She grew up there in the same community where we were. My father's name, of course, was George Will McCutchen.

JE: He was from that same area too?

GM: From that same area.

JE: What was your mother like? How would you describe her?

GM: My mother passed when I was only ten years old but she was a very active person. She never did any work outside the home; I guess because of raising seven children. She was very religious. She went to church almost every Sunday. I remember her as just a homemaker. She stayed there in the one-room cabin that we were born in, with one room with and an upstairs and a kitchen. She stayed there and worked doing the chores around the house while my father went out and worked.

JE: What did your father do, what kind of work did he do?

GM: My father was a sharecropper and, of course, Franklin Delano Roosevelt created a work program called the WPA. And he did some work with the WPA.

JE: What was a sharecropper?

GM: Living on the land that you farmed on, the farmer himself owned the land and instead of paying you a salary to work on the farm you were given a portion of the proceeds from the farm at the harvest time.

JE: Was that a fifty/fifty deal?

GM: I don't recall what it, what it was, but I know that that's the way it operated. He received part of the proceeds from what they took in at the end of the year or whatever time the crops materialized. Sharecropping.

- JE:** And you shared in the crop. The Works Progress Administration, the WPA, that was for millions of workers back then. They built parks and bridges and all sorts of things—
- GM:** Um-hmm (affirmative), and worked it—
- JE:** ...fed children and redistributed food.
- GM:** Yeah.
- JE:** What did your father do, do you recall?
- GM:** He worked in a rock quarry. I remember he would go and work where there was digging out rocks for building purposes and that sort of thing. On the roads, I mean, he would be working with road crews and that sort of thing. I don't know what kind of arrangement he had with them but it brought in some income for the family. And I don't know how often he worked but I know he was a WPA worker.
- JE:** How would you describe your dad, his personality?
- GM:** Well, he was a tall, stately person. I don't know what all I could say about him was he was a hard worker, I know that. That he seemed to have loved his children. He would always check on all of us when he would come in from work. We respected him because he was the head of the house.
- JE:** Tell us about this house you were born into. Did it have utilities, electric light, plumbing, and all that? Or what—
- GM:** No, didn't have electric lights. We had kerosene lamps. We had wood-burning stoves and fireplace. No running water. We had to bring water from a spring that was not a quarter of a mile from the home but was some distance from the home.
- JE:** That was probably one of your chores along with your brothers and sisters?
- GM:** Yeah, that was one of our chores to go down, bring water to drink, to cook with, and then, of course, we'd take a tub and bring water to bathe. That was routine and it wasn't just ourselves but the other folk in the community.
- JE:** Where you went to get that water, that was also probably a kind of a meeting place because others did the same thing.
- GM:** That's correct, yes. Sometimes during the summer months, some of the housewives would set up tubs down there and they would wash the clothes and they had lines down there where they would string out the clothes to dry. Sometimes two families might meet at the same time down there and wash together.
- JE:** And, again, this is in Kentucky.
- GM:** In Kentucky, in Warren County, Kentucky.

Chapter 03 - 7:00**Early Calling**

John Erling: As a young man on the farm you learned the chores on the farm. And you probably had a garden.

Dr. G. Calvin McCutchen: Yes, had a garden and we learned how to milk cows. We learned how to chop the weeds out of whatever crops we were raising. Corn and tobacco were the major crops that were raised in that community.

JE: But I don't know how old it was, you knew nobody was going to keep you down on the farm.

GM: Right. My one and only ambition growing up there in the rural community was that I would leave that farm. I would tell my father every once in a while, "When I get grown I'm going to leave here and move to the city."

My dad would say, "Boy, folk in the city are starving to death."

And I'd tell him, "I'm going to be right there starving with them." That was my attitude about that. And, of course, time fixed it that my father passed. My mother passed when I was only ten years old and when I was about fifteen years old my father passed. My younger sisters had already moved to stay with my grandmother. My oldest brother had gone into the army and my other brother was working with my uncle in his sharecropping. So I was the one that was left there at home with my father. I was about fifteen years old and my ambition was to finish high school.

To make a long story short, after my father died, my sister brought me out of hills of Kentucky to the big city of Cincinnati, Ohio, where I was able to finish high school.

JE: But didn't you have a calling on your life? Tell us about that, at an early age.

GM: At an early age, I guess before my mother passed, I used to talk a whole lot of religion with her and she always claimed I was going to be her preacher, you know, the preacher of the family. Well, I didn't think too much of it then but the year that I finished high school I accepted a calling into the ministry. But I had it in my mind that that's what the Lord wanted me to do, yes.

JE: Early on?

GM: Yeah, very early in my elementary school days I felt the calling but I had had no role models. I had a rural school teacher and when they would have Career Day, I guess, what you might call it and they asked everybody to tell what they were going to be when they grew up. Well, I would quietly say, "I'm going to a preacher." And everybody would laugh. And that would make me feel badly because I had no role models in the community.

But my teacher encouraged me, she said, "If you feel like that that's what the Lord wants to make of your life, don't be embarrassed about it." And then she went the

second mile, she'd go out in that rural community and on some outstanding preacher, with me preaching, she'd take me to hear him.

And then, of course, when I went to Cincinnati, Ohio, to live with my sister, my pastor there gave me an opportunity to preach my initial sermon.

JE: We'll get to that. Why do you think the kids laughed at you when you said you wanted to be a preacher?

GM: Preaching wasn't a very, I guess, noble, well, it wasn't called a profession at all, it was probably on the lowest rank as far as services. And even there in the rural community ministers were unleaded, I won't say completely unleaded, but they had no great formal education. They learned how to read and write and they learned how to preach and made a lot of noise on the pulpit. But as far as inspiring people and that sort of thing, they helped get folks saved and they did what they were called to do or programmed to do.

And in our community, of course, the churches only had worship service once a month. At the country church that we had Sunday school every Sunday but the minister only came from the city out there once a month.

I remember some of the early days of his ministry there was a lot of noise, you know, he would make a lot of noise from the pulpit, but as far as uplifting people and moving people forward spiritually that wasn't necessarily what was going on out there.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative). Didn't you at an early age, nine or ten years old, made a commitment to Jesus Christ and you were saved?

GM: Yes.

JE: For those who are listening and don't understand that, what does that mean?

GM: Well, it means when you decided to follow Jesus, when you made the most important decision of your life, that of deciding and accepting Jesus Christ as your personal Savior.

JE: You were ten years old when that happened?

GM: I was ten years old when that happened.

JE: Was that in a service, a minister that spoke, or—

GM: Oddly enough, and this is going back a ways, but in that rural community church they had what they call a "mourner's bench." Those who were unsaved in the community, young boys and girls, and they had a revival once a year, and you could only get saved probably once a year at the revival. And during that time, the parents would have you to come out and get on the mourner's bench. You would stay there with your head down while the service was going on and the folk praying for you and singing and praying and the preacher preaching the sermon.

And I somehow felt there was something wrong with that. But the way that I accepted Christ as my Savior—they took religion very seriously in the rural community and during the revival time, which was once a year, at noon the teachers would let those

who were seeking salvation out to go to the church, which was nearby, at the noon hour because they would have a noonday service also.

And the way I accepted Christ and the way I got saved was the minister didn't have us to put our heads down on the mourner's bench, he asked several of us that went to the church that day to just raise our heads up and look at him and he explained to us the simple plan of salvation. It was a matter of our deciding and accepting, which was illuminating for me, because somehow or another I felt to get saved I had to have some spectacular experience, I mean, I had to be like being stricken on the Damascus Road or something like that.

But it was just a matter of making a quiet choice that I'm going to follow Jesus. And I had decided and accepted him as my personal Savior. I've been running with him ever since.

Chapter 04 - 8:34

Kerosene Lamps

John Erling: The mourner's bench, were they to be mourning their sin, is that what they were—

Dr. G. Calvin McCutchen: Ah, yeah, I mean, I guess that was what it was about. The more I think about it I think one of the things we were taught that the person who is a sinner, they ought to become godly sorrow for their sins. I mean, and so being godly sorry you had to come to church, not look up, I mean, put your head down, and you were supposed to be praying while others were praying for you that you might become a saved person, that the Lord would save your soul.

JE: Because you were feeling so guilty and bad for your sins?

GM: Yeah, that's what it was, yeah. Because many times we had been told that sin was black, you know, and because heaven was happy and salvation was free, but you had to repent and feel godly sorrow for your sins. That was one way that we were taught. I don't think people do that anymore but in that rural community where I grew up that's the way a person, many of them, got saved.

JE: What was the name of that church?

GM: It was New Salem Baptist Church there in the hills of Kentucky in the rural community of Warren County, part of Rockfield, Kentucky.

JE: In this church, would you have instruments, a piano or anything?

GM: No piano in that church. Of course, I went back there several years later when I was a student in seminary and they had remodeled the church. They put a piano in there, but during that time they had no piano, no choir stand as such, but people sang

congregational songs. They probably had a song leader and folk kept the rhythm of the song with the patting of their feet.

JE: Okay, but—

GM: On a wood floor.

JE: And probably clapping.

GM: Clapping their hands and patting their feet on the floor. That was the way it was, yes.

JE: Do you think that spilled over to black churches all across America, the clapping of hands and—

GM: Well, yes, that's probably some of it, I mean, that's probably the black church tradition, I mean, I would say in many denominations, not all denominations, but in many denominations that's probably part of it.

JE: Do you remember the name of that elementary teacher who helped you?

GM: Her name was Ida Nell Finch, F-i-n-c-h. She was very helpful to me.

JE: Which promotes the idea that how important it is for people to reach out to boys and girls at a very young age because it can really make a difference.

GM: Right.

JE: And I'm sure you have done that and passed that on to many others.

GM: Yes, save my soul. And one of the joys that I had after I had been here at this church probably ten or fifteen years, she happened to be passing, she and her husband were on their way some place. I had put her on my mailing list for publications from this church and she decided to stop by and visit with me. And that was one of the greatest joys of my life. And I'm assured was a joy, I'm sure she's passed on by now but she was able to come to my home and visit with us there and came to view the church and that sort of thing that the Lord had permitted me to become the pastor of.

JE: Here at Mt. Zion Baptist Church.

GM: At Mt. Zion.

JE: A time that you will remember, obviously.

GM: Yeah.

JE: Tell us about your schooling, the elementary, where was that?

GM: They had a one-room school house there in that rural community. To this day, it causes me to wonder how one teacher could teach eight grades in a one-room school house. And taught every subject, you know, from spelling to reading to writing, arithmetic, geography and—

JE: History.

GM: ...history, certainly, even social studies. And yet they did it. But I kind of put it all together because what they did, they had a way of combing grades, you see. First and second was all together, and third and fourth, and fifth and sixth, and the seventh and

eighth. The seventh grade would be taking eighth grade and then they'd have to come back and take the seventh grade work, if they weren't ready to pass on.

Fortunately, I guess I was a pretty sharp learner or something because my seventh grade I was taking eighth grade work. And somewhere during the course of the year the teacher moved me from seventh grade to eighth grade and I never had to go back and take the seventh grade work. So I finished a year earlier than I ordinarily would have finished.

JE: Were you naturally interested in books and reading?

GM: I've always been interested in books and reading. When we would go to the city, where the other kids would spend their money going to the moving picture show or going to the pool hall or just be goofing off or buying candy I'd go in the stores and buy those paperback storybooks. Because I like Western stories. I knew all about Hopalong Cassidy and Wild Bill Hickok and all of them, Gene Autry. I would keep up with them. I always just loved reading. And, of course, when I went to college I majored in history, had a minor in English. And, of course, my greatest joy was world literature, reading world literature.

JE: I'm picturing in my mind the house that you lived in with no electricity but you had kerosene lanterns.

GM: Yeah.

JE: Would you read by the light of that kerosene lantern?

GM: Yeah, the best we could and when you don't know any better you can make out. I have one kerosene lamp in my house right now, and when the lights go out and we turn it on and I can't hardly see my way around that house with that one light. I would often wonder how we were able to survive. That's the only light that we had—kerosene lamps. And lanterns, we had kerosene lanterns when we had to go somewhere, to a neighbor's house or somewhere like that and it was real dark, maybe we might light a lantern.

JE: Abraham Lincoln didn't have anything over on you.

GM: Yeah.

JE: Because they always say he read by candlelight.

GM: Well—

JE: A kerosene lamp is a lot like candlelight.

GM: I, yeah, like candlelight. And the preaching, the first years of my minister when I was in seminary and would go back up in the rural community where I was born and grew up to preach, I kind of dreaded having to preach at nighttime because of the fact that the only lights they had in that little church were kerosene lamps. And they had them fastened on the walls. And they might have had one in the center of the church. If you were manuscript minister and you had to read by those candle lights.

JE: Was that your style, to be a manuscript minister?

GM: Manuscript is mostly what I, yeah.

JE: And so you were—

GM: I'm sort of trying. We had to learn how to get your sermon in your head and your heart and use the notes there as your guide because you couldn't see as well, you know, in those rural churches with those kind of lights on.

JE: You were enjoying preaching at an early age, weren't you?

GM: I did, I really enjoyed preaching at an early age. I guess you go through a lot of changes in the ministry because after I finished high school I was drafted into the marines. Somehow I felt like I ought to forget all about preaching. I said, "When I come back to the community I'm just going to ditch the idea." But I think when the Lord puts you in the ministry there's no way you can really shake off that responsibility. Because even while I was in the marines my commissioned officers would recognize something different about me then. They had me offer prayer in the barracks at night before we all turned in for the night. And then give me a softer job, you know, rather than chopping bushes I'd be allowed to stay at the barracks and keep the fires burning and that sort of thing. So the Lord fixed it where I didn't forget about the ministry.

Chapter 05 - 3:30

First Integrated High School

John Erling: When you finished high school that was in Cincinnati, Ohio?

Dr. G. Calvin McCutchen: Cincinnati, Ohio.

JE: The other schools you'd been to where all black.

GM: Right.

JE: Was this an integrated high school?

GM: It was an integrated high school, it was the first integrated school. I graduated in 1944, it was the first school I had ever attended that was integrated.

JE: Was that a big adjustment for you?

GM: Well, not for me, but, well, yeah, I guess it was, come to think about it because I had some getting used to. Coming out of the country into a great big school where there were five hundred and some graduates in my class, that was a great adjustment. Because the building itself, well, you'd get lost in the building. I lived twenty blocks in walking distance. It was quite an adjustment because I had never witnessed that many students. And then all of our teachers were white, even in that integrated school. That was a little different too.

JE: Would that have been your first time to experience prejudice?

GM: You know, oddly enough I did not experience any prejudice, being a juvenile, I guess myself, it just didn't—even though you were with the white students and the white teachers, if they didn't make any difference to you, you didn't make any difference with them. It didn't bother me.

JE: You also worked along the way, you worked even when you were in high school in Cincinnati.

GM: Right, the Lord opened a way for me. My sister, who brought me out of the country to Cincinnati, she said, "Now I can't take care of you but I'll help. And you'll have to get a job."

Oddly enough, I didn't mind that because I had been used to paying my own way, even out there in the country. What little money you made you saved it and spent it properly.

But she thought to find me a job. She walked up and down there in the streets of Cincinnati checking out places that had "Help Wanted," to see whether or not they would hire me. While I'm in school she's out looking for me a job. She came within one block of where we were living and in the grocery store there on the corner—it was owned by a German in a black community. And I think NAACP possibly was leaning on him, at least he ought to have some blacks in the stores that were in the community, some workers.

So my sister went in there and approached the man, even though she didn't trade with him all the time, she went in there and told him, "I have a brother that has come to town and he needs a job. I'd like for you to hire him if you would."

The man said, "What reason would you give that I should hire your brother sight unseen?"

She said, "Well, one thing, he grew up in the country and he knows how to work. And because another point about," said, "by growing up in the rural community he's honest."

So the man said, "Well, send him on up here."

I went up there and that same day they had me ringing the cash register, stocking the shelves, and doing anything. And I worked there until I finished high school.

JE: That would have been in the '40s.

GM: That was in '43, '44.

JE: Because you graduate in '44, yeah.

GM: 'Forty-four, yeah.

Chapter 06 - 5:23**Tulsa, Oklahoma**

John Erling: You were fourteen, I believe, December 7, 1941?

Dr. G. Calvin McCutchen: Yes.

JE: Pearl Harbor? Do you remember that day?

GM: I remember that day. I was walking home from a little job that I had and I heard over the radio, I didn't understand it, you know, but I heard them talking about Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor.

JE: You remember any people around you being nervous or guys going off to the war?

GM: I—I don't remember too much of that.

JE: You said radio, do you remember programs that you listened to on the radio?

GM: *The Grand Ole Opry*, in Nashville, Tennessee. It was one of our major programs, it came on on Saturday nights.

JE: WSM.

GM: WSM out of Nashville. Even sometimes when our radio wasn't working we would walk across the field to a neighbor's house and listen. I think it came on around eight o'clock and stayed on until about nine. And we would stay at their house as long as the folk would allow us to stay, as youngsters, listening to *The Grand Ole Opry*.

JE: You remember listening to President Roosevelt, hearing him on the radio?

GM: Yes, I can't remember anything he said but I can remember following him as president of the United States.

JE: You graduate from high school, and what was the name of that high school?

GM: It was Woodward, Woodward High School.

JE: Somewhere in that time, you restated your ambition to be a minister.

GM: Right.

JE: You became real public about it.

GM: Yeah, I preached my initial sermon. The pastor set a date and I preached my initial at the Calvary Baptist Church there in Cincinnati. From there to Simmons Bible College in Louisville. Apparently I didn't make a very good impression on that pastor because of the fact that he did not entertain a motion that they would give me my license.

But when his assistant minister came to Louisville to some ministers' seminar there at the school where I was attending, I was asked to give the welcome to all of the people who came. And the assistant minister of the church heard me give the welcome to the folk and said to me, "You never did preach your initial sermon."

And I said, "Yes I did."

And he said, "Well, do you have a license?"

I said, "No I do not."

He said, "Well, I'm going to go by the Baptist Bookstore and pick up a license for you and you come on back to Cincinnati this weekend and I'm going to see to it that the pastor grants you your license."

From then on, the pastor and I became pretty close, because even when I was in seminary in Nashville, Cincinnati was my home. And I would come there on weekends and he would have me to preach for him.

Matter of fact, when I graduated from seminary, the pastor had already set up a council for me to give me my ordination, there in Cincinnati.

JE: You attended American Baptist College of the Bible?

GM: Right, in Nashville.

JE: It was your seminary training.

GM: That's right, yes. It was called American Baptist Theological Seminary at that time. Since that time they changed it to the College of the Bible.

JE: You graduated in 19...?

GM: I graduated from there in 1950.

JE: You took other work as well at Tennessee State?

GM: At Tennessee State, I went on from there, I told people, I said, "When I came out of seminary there at American Baptist College of the Bible I was frightened I might be called to a church and in fear of how little I knew." So I decided to continue on and further on my education by enrolling in Tennessee State. I went on there and got a degree from Tennessee State. Yes.

JE: And then something happened just hours before you graduated at Tennessee State?

GM: During my last months, let me put it like that. At Tennessee State, the Reverend Jase Dotson, who was the pastor here at Mt. Zion, his health had failed and someone had suggested to him to write the American Baptist College of the Bible and ask the president to recommend someone who was interested in finding a life's work. Even though I'd been away from the seminary almost three years, the president of the school remembered me.

During my seminary days I preached for a lot of folk when they went on vacations and when they just needed a special speaker and that sort of thing. And so he remembered that and called me and asked my permission to send my name in to Reverend Dotson here at Mt. Zion.

I granted him the permission and the late Reverend Dotson and I started a correspondence. The day after I finished Tennessee State, in August on a Sunday we graduated and marched with the class, and Wednesday of that same week I was here in Tulsa.

JE: In 1953.

GM: In '53 it was, yes.

JE: You would have been twenty-six?

GM: Yes, I would have been twenty-six, that's what it was. I thought I became pastor when I was thirty, yes.

Chapter 07 - 8:42

Prejudice in Tulsa

John Erling: Here you come out of Cincinnati, Ohio, for the first time to Oklahoma and to Tulsa. What was your impression? What did you observe and feel?

Dr. G. Calvin McCutchen: Well, I was really impressed with Tulsa. I lived in cities like Cincinnati, Ohio, and Louisville, Kentucky, and Nashville, Tennessee, and buildings were smoked up and old and I think what impressed me was the cleanliness of City of Tulsa. I guess since they didn't burn coal for heating purposes and buildings were all bright and even in our neighborhood around this church at that time the city, they had some sweeping machines that would go up and down the street and sweep the streets.

I think I read in some publication that Tulsa was a city that bathed every night. I was impressed with that. One of the things that shook me up about Tulsa was even though I lived in Cincinnati where there was no prejudice, and then, of course, I went to Louisville where there was just some prejudice but not advanced. But then I went to Nashville where it was a different story. But even there I survived better with the prejudices in Nashville because you're riding on the back of a bus, but the buses that you ride on went mostly in the African American community and you didn't experience any prejudice because the bus filled up from the back forward and it didn't bother you.

But then when I came to Tulsa I ran into some prejudices that I hadn't experienced in all of my life, mainly the one was even as a student I'd get credit in any store that I'd go into. If I'd go in there for shoes, I guess they were, they had them stores. If I needed a shirt or a suit or something I could go in there and open me up a charge account and pay two or three dollars a week.

JE: This was in the other towns you were in?

GM: In Nashville.

JE: In Nashville.

GM: But when I came to Tulsa, I had been here I guess maybe three months and the pastor required that I wear a dark suit in the pulpit every Sunday if I was going to preach—and

I did all the preaching—so he told me that I had to have a dark suit. But I only had one dark suit. I promised of wearing the same suit every Sunday. So I went to Renberg's Store downtown to buy me another dark suit.

The man took my application. I gave him all my credit references of stores back in Nashville. He told me to, "Come back in ten days and I'll tell you whether or not you're approved."

When I came back in ten days, he said, "No, we can't pull your credit. You haven't been in the city long enough."

Well, he could have told me that in the beginning.

Another heartbreaking experience I had, I used to ride the bus and the bus stopped right outside and I'd ride it downtown and then catch a bus and come right back here to the church. I went into one store, I hate to mention the name of it because later years I was able to get a line of credit. But they're no longer in Tulsa anymore, Wolf Brothers, it was.

JE: Okay.

GM: They had a store downtown. I walked in there and stood around the counter I guess for ten minutes. Folk were coming in there and they were waiting on them and they just completely ignored the fact that I was in that store. I finally got the message, I said, *These folk ain't going to sell to me.* And I was only in there to look at the neckties. They had a thing of neckties so I went in there. I saw one in the window that I wanted to price it to see how much it was and nobody would even talk with me and I walked on out.

And when I got back and I told the pastor of this church what had happened, he said, "What store was it?"

And I mentioned the name of it, and he said, "Well, you wasn't even supposed to go in there." He said, "Folk don't go in there."

But things changed in Tulsa because one ambition I had was to have me a credit account at Wolf Brothers Store. I did have one before they left the city.

JE: How did that make you feel then about Tulsa? And did it make you feel you still wanted to stay here? Or—

GM: Well, I was here. I had no other job offering and I enjoyed what I was doing. I mean, I had more ministry than I could possibly do because the pastor was ill. His health had failed and he only took care of the administrative part of the work. I did all the preaching, all the visiting the sick, attending auxiliaries and burying the dead and all that. I had to do it all and I enjoyed ministry. I wasn't planning on going nowhere and so I just stayed and worked it out.

JE: That's in the '50s.

GM: Yes.

JE: At that time also weren't there signs around town, "Blacks are not served here," or—

- GM:** Well, there was a public accommodation on us where blacks weren't served anywhere in eating establishments.
- JE:** They weren't?
- GM:** They weren't.
- JE:** Public accommodation?
- GM:** Yeah, like coffee shops, cafeterias, and places like that. Because I got involved later in the civil rights movement where they have opened doors and—
- JE:** Right, and I want to talk about that. But on Elgin Street where the church has been, this is where you first came, to this address.
- GM:** Right, right.
- JE:** In the Greenwood area.
- GM:** Right.
- JE:** So then the blacks from this area were not welcome to go downtown Tulsa at all. Is that true?
- GM:** Well, they went downtown but they weren't welcome to eat in establishments. They'd go down there and buy clothes. Some stores were open for them but Chris's Ten Cent Store, they had a lunch counter down there. They wasn't even allowed to sit down at the lunch counter in Chris's downtown, places like that.
- JE:** If you wanted to eat out of your home you'd have to do it here in this Greenwood area.
- GM:** Right, in the Greenwood area. Oddly enough, another thing that impressed me about Tulsa when I came here was the black Wall Street. I lived in Nashville, in Louisville, in Cincinnati, I'd never seen as many black businesses in all the days of my life, because they had everything on the north side. They had eatin' establishments, they had pharmacists, they had drugstores, they had variety stores, dry cleaners shop, I mean, anything, shoe shops, whatever you wanted you could find it right here on the north side.
- JE:** You naturally would like to go downtown Tulsa but nobody really had to go down there.
- GM:** No, that's the truth, that's very true. They didn't have to go downtown.
- JE:** How did you handle the prejudice?
- GM:** It really didn't bother me all that much. Sometimes you were embarrassed but somehow or other you made up your mind, *Well, that's just how it is, you know.* And you went on with it.

One experience that I had in, I guess it was Kansas City, Kansas, it might have been, I had been in a meeting in Denver, Colorado, and some friends of mine brought me back to Kansas City and dropped me at the bus station to catch a bus back to Tulsa from there. And while I was there at the bus station I decided to get me a cup of coffee before getting on the bus. I went in a coffee shop and ordered a cup of coffee and they gave it to me and I sat down to try to drink the coffee and they told me, "You can't drink that in here, you're going to have to get up and get out of here."

That was a strange feeling because you wondered, it didn't even seem right that you could buy the coffee but then couldn't even drink the coffee.

I remember catching a bus out of Cincinnati. I think I went to El Dorado, somewhere in Kansas it was, I rode a bus out of Cincinnati, I being the only black on the bus. And we were going through some parts of the South where they probably didn't even have a waiting room for blacks. So the driver, he would take me in the kitchen with him when we would get a snack or something. He'd tell me, he said, "Come on, you're going with me." That was the way it was at that time. And you just kind of grinned and would bear it, you know, because that was just the times in which you lived.

JE: Well, it wasn't just you, I don't know if you took it personally or not, but you knew that it wasn't just me, it was everybody else.

GM: No, no, it was everybody else. You couldn't take it personal, by any means.

Chapter 08 - 4:07

Mt. Zion in Race Massacre

John Erling: Let's talk about the history of this church, Mt. Zion Baptist Church.

Dr. G. Calvin McCutchen: All right.

JE: When was this church built here at this location, 419?

GM: Yeah, it was organized in 1909, but the building, they struggled around until about in the '21s, I think it was like 1916 when they started a building project of building pretty much the same size that the present Mt. Zion is. And it took them several years to complete the building.

JE: Because of funds, I suppose, money?

GM: Because of funds, right. And when they completed they had a \$50,000 mortgage on the building. They entered it in April of 1921, with a \$50,000 mortgage hanging over it. They were rejoicing, you know, in the new building, second to none in the north side, as far as African American churches were concerned. Less than three months later, June 1, 1921, it was, the Race Riot destroyed that building.

JE: That Memorial Day weekend—

GM: Yeah.

JE: ...the Race Riot broke out.

GM: Right.

JE: That building on this site, how was it destroyed?

GM: Fire bombs, they had dropped fire bombs on top of the church.

JE: From planes?

GM: From planes. And they said the reason they were doing that was because the Riot had started downtown and it threatened people all over the neighborhood. But the reason the church, Mt. Zion, was burned was it being the newest church in the community it was reported that there was an arsenal, that ammunition was being stored in the building.

I read in some literature where the authorities came and sifted through the rubble of the church and found no indication whatsoever that there were any of—

JE: For those who are listening now, tell us how it actually started.

GM: Well, as far as I can understand, his real name was Roland.

JE: Dick Roland.

GM: Dick Roland. Rubbed against a white lady in an elevator. Someone saw it or something and said that he had made some advances or something on her. The word got out in the community, you know, that Dick Roland had—I've heard the story told so much times—that had inappropriately rubbed against this white lady. There was a group downtown, I understand, that made it that they were going to lynch him. The way I understand it, I've heard this story told a lot of times, the group on the north side were going downtown to meet the group that was going to do the lynching. The way I understand it, the reason the gunfire started was that one of them from the north side dropped his gun or something and it went off. I've heard it told in a lot of ways, that really touched off the Riot.

JE: The sheriff put Dick Roland in jail.

GM: Yeah.

JE: As much for his protection as anything.

GM: That's what it was.

JE: So this gathering was around the jail.

GM: Around the jail, that's right.

JE: Some wanted to lynch and then others obviously wanted to protect him.

GM: Um-hmm (affirmative). Yeah, right, so—

JE: And that was—

GM: That's the way it worked, yeah.

JE: But also the First Baptist Church of Tulsa—

GM: Yeah.

JE: ...had been built.

GM: Right.

JE: That goes back to 1899, I believe.

GM: Right, there's ten years before Mt. Zion, and it was located on Archer Street, way up close to the business district. The reason it wasn't bothered was because it was so close to the white neighborhood. Matter of fact, the rioters probably assumed it was not even a part of the African American community.

JE: They may have thought it was a white church.

GM: Yeah, that's true, yeah, because I remember when they moved from that location where they were to the present building where they are now, they ought to burn that church on Greenwood since I've been in the city.

Chapter 09 - 5:50

Coping after Massacre

John Erling: So when you came here there were scars on the people's minds. This was in 1953 you came here.

Dr. G. Calvin McCutchen: Yeah.

JE: But the 1921 Race Riot still was impacting many of these people who had been survivors.

GM: Right.

JE: You had to deal with that.

GM: Right.

JE: And what were their thoughts and concerns? What was going on at that time?

GM: I think what helped my situation in the early days that I was here as pastor with some of those Race Riot survivors still alive and anxious to tell their story. On the first Sunday in June of each year at the evening worship service to share with the oncoming generation, we have a special commemoration of it. Not for the hate aspect of it but just to let the younger generation the struggles that the church had come through. We had folk who lived through the Riot would tell their side of the story on what they were doing during that particular time. Which was most helpful.

We had one member, of course, you've probably heard of her that lived until she was 104 years old and died not too long ago, Ms. Mabel Little, Ms. Mabel B. Little. She was a beautician and she not only lost her home, but she also lost her business. She said what hurt her the most during the Riot was the loss of her church. She had three things that would bother her but she loved to talk about what all they did during that Riot to stay alive. And then how they coped after the Riot was over.

JE: Weren't many of them marched to the Fairgrounds—

GM: Yes.

JE: ... and kept there.

GM: I think some of them were, I've forgotten half of the stories that I heard. There was who were marched to the Fairgrounds and some that just hid out and remained in the community, even after the Riot was over.

JE: Elsewhere in this website I've interviewed Otis Clark.

GM: Yes.

JE: Who was nineteen at the time of the Riot.

GM: Right.

JE: And he talks about how bullets were being—

GM: Yes.

JE: ...fired at him and his friends. Virtually this whole area then was burned down.

GM: Correct. Mt. Zion was one of the five churches, five or six churches that were destroyed, but Mt. Zion suffered the most because it was the newest, and shall we say, the pride of North Tulsa. The members, of course, suffered greatly because of the fact that they had a heavy debt on that church when it happened.

JE: Fifty thousand dollars.

GM: Fifty thousand dollars mortgage on the church when it happened.

JE: Who was the pastor of the church then?

GM: R. A. Whitaker, R. A. Whitaker was the pastor.

JE: So was he able to get the survivors together early on and they met some other place?

GM: For a few days they met in one of the member's houses that were not destroyed. And then they managed to build some kind of tabernacle on the grounds.

In the meantime, he was so devastated by the church being destroyed and the members all upset and important decisions to be made, his health failed him. And he finally resigned, I don't know how long afterward, but he resigned the position as pastor.

Several ministers were selected as pastor, some of them stayed one year, two years. And that went on until 1937, I believe it was, when they called the Reverend Jase Dotson, my predecessor.

JE: He stayed, obviously.

GM: Yeah he stayed for twenty years. And the present Mt. Zion structure was erected under his administration.

JE: When you came to Tulsa you had never heard of the 1921 Race Riot.

GM: No, I didn't know one thing about the Race Riot.

JE: And so, I don't know, it must have been early on that this came to your attention—

GM: Yeah.

JE: ... and your congregants were affected by it.

GM: Right, yeah.

JE: How did that affect your ministry, and did you preach about it from the pulpit? And then when you had your commemoration services you used the Bible perhaps, or your text, to talk about how we live with this?

GM: Well, somehow or another you find yourself not necessarily preaching about the Riot itself but Mt. Zion had a slogan, “The church that faith built.” And you would find yourself talking more about faith and how faith works and the importance of faith, keeping the faith, and that sort of thing. A strong faith for tough times, all kinds of ways that you could try to encourage the members of the church that he didn’t bring us this far to leave us.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

GM: That we had to keep the faith. In recent years under my administration, they added a little more to the slogan of the church, “The church that faith built to stand in the gap to serve mankind.”

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

GM: That’s the way it works out.

JE: Very understandably the survivors of the 1921 Race Riot would have anger in their heart toward the whites. Did you have to deal with that?

GM: Oddly enough, I think the African American people are very forgiving people. I feel that way about it, I mean, I never had to counsel anybody, you know, about their anger of what went on. Well, I didn’t meet that many of them. Later in my ministry I got involved with the civil rights movement but I never had to counsel with too many folk about their feelings in that.

Chapter 10 - 8:50

Civil Rights

John Erling: We talked about the '50s, but in the '60s times were a changing.

Dr. G. Calvin McCutchen: Yes.

JE: Because in the '60s, Tulsa then would have been in the middle of the Civil Rights Movement.

GM: Right.

JE: How did you involve yourself in that?

GM: I was asked by the late Reverend B. S. Roberts and the late Reverend Ben H. Hill to join the NAACP movement in the civil rights struggle. I was appointed one of the sponsors of the young people, the youth. Matter of fact, being a younger pastor myself my job along with Reverend B. S. Roberts working with the NAACP, we sponsored the young people who did the sit-in and demonstrations and the marches and that sort of thing, we did all that.

JE: Can you explain some sit-in situations here in Tulsa? What would you do?

GM: What we would do we would each Saturday—and I spent a lot of money out of my pocket doing this—but each Saturday we would be at B. S. Roberts' church, St. John AME, it was. A group of young people would always meet with us, the parents would drop them off. We would talk with them first and then we would take them to the various eating places. And, of course, we had to provide them with funds for fear that they were allowed to eat in the place.

But what was happening in so many places, even on the north side, they had a Borden's out there in what they call "Northland" that we worried about to eat in. What happened, we'd just drop them off and they would always be an adult with them, of course. If they were served, then we could say, you know, we didn't bother that place anymore. But if they were threw them out, sometimes they would throw folk out bodily or they would call the police and they would be arrested for trespassing.

That's where conflict with my wife and I came in. My wife was a juvenile officer and when they bring the kids down to the City Hall it would be her responsibility to book these kids in as trespassers.

I would sometimes go with them into the place but I would always be with that group that got up and walked out when they asked you to go out and were not arrested. One reason for it I hated it, was put on the spot, my wife being a police officer. She told me that if anytime she was forced to book me and testify with them kids she was going to quit her job. And at that time, Mt. Zion wasn't pay me enough to keep both of our heads above water.

JE: So that's why she became a police officer is to supplement your income?

GM: Well, well, yeah, well, she was working with them again. For some reason, I won't say it was just to supplement my income but it was to help, I'm sure. What happened, she was doing fairly well as a nurse at Morton Hospital, a registered nurse, one of the few registered nurses they had. But they only had one African American policewoman on the force and she was retiring. So she saw in the paper where they was giving the civil service exam for someone to take her place. She just out of the blue decided to go down and take the civil service exam—and made the highest score of others who took the exam—and they hired her. She was the second African American policewoman on the Tulsa Police Force. And she worked with the police force for twenty years.

JE: She never did have to book you in?

GM: No, no, she didn't have to book me in because I was careful not to embarrass her by having to go down there.

JE: But I suppose these demonstrations or protests were all to be peaceful and that was you—

GM: They were peaceable protests, no violence was involved. Chance those who didn't mind being booked in for trespassing and went on. And, of course, their parents had to come and I don't think no fine was placed against them, they just take them in down there and call their parents. And their parents had to come down and get them out and they wouldn't have to pay no fee or nothing like that.

And one of the things I was fearful of, I never did want any law-breaking on my record. That was one thing also that I never went to jail. Reverend Ben H. Hill never went to jail either, Vernon AME and the Brother B. S. Roberts was over at St. John AME he went several times to jail. But I don't think no fines were levied or anything like that.

JE: Was it mostly restaurants you were targeting?

GM: That was about it, the restaurants.

JE: Were they downtown Tulsa?

GM: Downtown and different parts of the city. During that time, I want to mention the fact that we had ministers from all across the city of the various denominations who would join us in checking out restaurants to see whether they were open to African Americans. Like a white person would join up with me and we would check out a restaurant. We'd go in there and order and if they served us without any complaints then we wouldn't bother them no more. We'd write that one up that you don't have to worry about that one.

And, of course, we worked toward getting the Public Accommodation Ordinance passed. And I think it was a good thing that it was passed because even proprietors found out that the color was not white or black or green, you know.

JE: The green money.

GM: That green money. And I even talked with some of the owners of places where they wouldn't allow us to be served. One guy told me that they were fearful that we as African Americans would come in and some of those who had prejudices would feel intimidated by our coming in there. And then once we got the place open we were going to leave the place and then we would draw a lot of his customers who were regular customers who were coming in there. And we wouldn't be a supporting type of a customer because we were temporary, you see.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

GM: You could sympathize with a person who was in business to make money.

JE: Right.

GM: But finally had to realize that once they opened the doors anybody could go in and nobody was paying attention to any of the others.

JE: You saw it begin to make a difference.

GM: Definitely saw it.

JE: You'd have anywhere from ten, twenty, thirty who would just come on to a restaurant.

GM: Yes.

JE: And somebody would walk in and say, "We're here to be served."

GM: Yeah.

JE: And so he'd see all those people out there.

GM: Yeah.

JE: And he would either decide no, I will not, or say, "Okay, you're here, come on in."

GM: Yeah, right.

JE: Once you did that and they served you once, then that restaurant said, "Okay, we're open to both blacks and whites."

GM: Right.

JE: It was making a difference.

GM: It was making a difference, yes. Some place, I've forgotten where it was, we were in a restaurant out of town and seeing what had happened in Tulsa with African Americans eating all over town in places. We went in this town, we were two ministers attending a meeting.

The waitresses there, they would come and tell us, "Oh, we won't serve you but we want you to know if the boss comes in and he's coming to embarrass you, don't feel badly about it," something like that.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

GM: You just had to sit there and eat in a hurry, hoping that the boss is not going to come in so would have a confrontation with him so that the server who were on a spot because of such stuff like that.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

GM: Now many cases we'd gone into places even between here and Muskogee, fish market where they serve fish down around Coweta somewhere out there on Highway 51. I'd go in there and order fish and they would fix it for you to carry out.

JE: But they wouldn't let you stay there and eat it?

GM: No. I was a little reluctant to do that. But then I've been with some ministers who would say, "Well, if we can't eat it in here, we don't want it." I mean, even though we had them to fix it up to be carried out. That's the kind of thing that was going on during those times.

JE: You said that a Public Accommodation Ordinance was passed. Was that a city—

GM: Yeah, a city ordinance.

JE: That would have been the later '60s?

GM: I've forgotten what year it was, it was, it was possibly after '63, because—

JE: Yes.

GM: ... wasn't the March on Washington—

JE: In '63.

GM: ... in '63. It was probably after '63.

JE: Yeah.

Chapter 11 - 9:12

School Integration

John Erling: Our Tulsa Public Schools were not integrated at this time either.

Dr. G. Calvin McCutchen: No.

JE: Yet white teachers were being integrated into the system.

GM: Right.

JE: You got involved in that as well. I think you became a substitute teacher.

GM: Right, I became a substitute teacher simply because when they first integrated the school system they integrated teachers but they didn't integrate the pupils. The starting point was the integrating teachers. The dedication on the part of the black teachers were high, you know. They'd come to work sick. There were no absentees.

But the white was a little different story. They might have had a hangover on Sunday night or something like that, and Monday morning I always had a job. I mean, I was working. But I went out and was talking with one of the principals and he mentioned his problem was finding people to fill in in places. Because an unmanned class during the day was disruptive failure.

So I told my him, I said, "Well, you know, I have a teacher's certificate in social studies and English and I was an accredited teacher when I came here from Nashville. If I can help you I'll go out and sign up as a substitute."

He said, "Well, you do that."

And I went out that one day to sign up, they called me the next day to come to one of the school rooms. And I told him, I said, "Well, I haven't been approved yet."

He said, "That's all right. We'll see to it that you get paid."

I guess I worked a couple of months before I was really on the payroll, but I had unlimited days for twelve or fourteen years, even though I was pastoring the church I'd work here, work with the school system, teaching social studies or English. I worked on the secondary level.

And did a lot of that. It helped in a lot of ways, even with my own situation.

JE: You got paid but you drew from that enormously because then the whites were integrated.

- GM:** Yeah.
- JE:** Right into the school system.
- GM:** Right, right, yeah.
- JE:** Like we're talking about Booker T. Washington.
- GM:** I didn't work at Booker T. Washington, I worked in McLain.
- JE:** Okay.
- GM:** And I worked in a secondary level at the junior high, as they called them, they're called middle schools now. I worked at the Marian Anderson mostly, which was a middle school. I worked at Carver.
- JE:** So you were then when the white students were brought into those schools?
- GM:** Right.
- JE:** And let's talk about that a little bit because the anticipation of that happening and the first days or weeks had to be some time of tension.
- GM:** Well, it seemed like to me that it wasn't that bad. Of course, I wasn't there with it every day. Once it got settled in various schools it was kind of routine. I mean, I started phasing out too at that particular time.
- JE:** But it gave you a feel—
- GM:** Yeah.
- JE:** ... so that when you were talking to the young people here in the church you understood what they were talking about.
- GM:** Certainly, yes. Yeah, certainly.
- JE:** I believe Dr. Bruce Howell was superintendent back then?
- GM:** Tony Mason was superintendent of schools, I know.
- JE:** Yes, Bruce Howell came after him. Another activist was Nancy McDonald, remember her name?
- GM:** Well, Nancy McDonald, I know Nancy McDonald.
- JE:** Yeah. She was a volunteer.
- GM:** Volunteer.
- JE:** And when Booker T. Washington was integrated she was there.
- GM:** Oh yes, certainly. Yeah, I remember when she was up there.
- JE:** When that was there.
- GM:** Yeah, they had community leaders, you know, they had folk in there to kind of help with the integration process. And I wasn't one among those, matter of fact, as I say, I just worked very little with Booker Washington. Most of my work was with the secondary schools.
- JE:** The Klu Klux Klan, was their presence made around in this time period or '50s or '60s when you were around?

GM: I—I never—I never witnessed any of the Klu Klux Klan except the only time I even saw a Klan was in Jacksonville, Florida, when I was there attending a convention during the '60s, when they had opened up the hotels to African Americans. Even in Jacksonville, Florida, and they had some Klansmen that were walking around the hotel, you know, picketing the hotel.

JE: Did they have their hoods on?

GM: Hoods on. I remember I was sharing a room with the late Reverend Jake Erickson Jackson of Paradise, he and I were attending the convention together. We made a joke of it. I said, "Now there was a time when you mentioned the Klans that we would be running in the opposite direction." I said, "Now we're going to get up out of our beds and go down and stand on the street and watch them and look at the glass. Because the fact is," I said, "the times is changed when we'd be running."

JE: Yeah.

GM: But now we are able because we are protected. Of course, the police officers were out there also. And I was told that they were not necessarily there to protect us as much as they were to keep us from bothering, from bothering the Klan. Because the fact is they was putting their lives on the line because we could have easily been some radical person among us could have jumped on one of them.

JE: Right.

GM: You know, with them marching around.

JE: Right.

GM: But then I remember one time here, and I believe that was even during Susan Savage's time, when a few Klansmen were having a meeting somewhere in Tulsa and they had a special meeting here at Mt. Zion. And the mayor asked the ministers and the church folk to come together and I don't know what purpose we were together for, I guess, not to go down and disturb them or anything like that, but to kind of clear the air, you know.

I remember them making a short speech in the session of it. But Klans are nothing like that in Tulsa, not in my time.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

GM: I mean, they haven't been any great, great bother.

JE: You remember the names of stores in downtown Tulsa like Renberg's and Clarke's Good Clothes?

GM: Yeah.

JE: Vandevs?

GM: Vandevs, yeah.

JE: What about the restaurants?

GM: You know, I don't remember too many restaurants downtown other than Piccadilly was downtown. That was one that we did a lot of work with.

JE: Where was that located?

GM: On Third Street. The Globe Store was right there close by, it was on Third and probably were the *World* building is, part of the *Tulsa World*, between Main and Boulder on Third Street.

JE: On Third Street.

GM: On the east side of the street. There was a Piccadilly Restaurant in there.

JE: When you were speaking from the pulpit, did you talk about racism? Was that an issue for you?

GM: Not really. Throughout my ministry I've been called upon to make speeches with veterans to the Martin Luther King Memorial. The idea was to encourage folk, "If you don't push, nothing moves," you know, and sometimes you've got to get up and get out and get involved in what's going on around you. Those would be some of the things that I would advocate. You would tell the story about Moses and the children of Israel, how they marched out of slavery, you know, journeyed toward the Promised Land.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

GM: But you wouldn't just harp on—

JE: No.

GM: ...that sort of thing.

JE: But you could not preach just dealing with the Old Testament or New Testament, you would bring in the life of your congregants, what they were facing—

GM: Yes.

JE: ... social issues.

GM: Right.

JE: Certainly had to be mixed into your sermons.

GM: Certainly. Right.

JE: You make application from the Bible to where they were living at that time.

GM: Right.

JE: You had to feel that and this was a real key position you were in.

GM: Yeah, as minister of a congregation and we had a pretty large congregation at that time, much larger than it is now, you had to challenge the folk and you had to keep them encouraged. Hope is the last thing to die within a person. You know, that extra hope.

Some summers that I recall preaching, you know, that hope is not just a four-letter word, you know.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

GM: And some prayers that you can pray, but then sometimes you have to put the hands and feet to your prayers.

JE: Yeah.

GM: And that sort of thing. That was some of the ideas.

JE: With your preaching ministry and you're out in the community, would people come to you for counsel? You'd be a counselor then to these people?

GM: Certainly so. There'd be people who will have all kinds of problems, even now, I mean, I think I spend a good deal of my ministry right now talking with people with problems.

Three points that I try to share with people are the past, we ought to be mindful of where we've come, what past we ought to be mindful. And then the present, we ought to be faithful. And for the future, hopeful. I mean, those, mindful, faithful, and hopeful, those are keys that we have to live by.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

GM: Things can be bad right now but let's hope that there's a better day, even on tomorrow.

JE: Right.

Chapter 12 - 6:04

Witnessed MLK Speech

John Erling: We referred to the March on Washington where Martin Luther King spoke August 28, 1963—

Dr. G. Calvin McCutchen: Yeah, yeah.

JE: ...“I have a dream,” speech. Did you hear that speech?

GM: I was there. The late Reverend Ben Hill of Vernon AME Church and the Reverend B. S. Roberts of St. John AME Church and myself were the only African American ministers who joined the march on Washington. And I went by accident because I really hadn't thought about going. But I had gathered up funds, I mean, I was well-known as one of the leading Baptist preachers, so I could go around these fellows and ask them for money to finance the bus to Washington for a group of our young folk to go. I gathered up about five hundred bucks, I guess, or more. I took it down there to Ben Hill and paid for the bus.

And Ben Hill told me, he said, “You are going, aren't you, McCutchen?”

I said, “Man, I hadn't even thought about it.”

And he said, “Well, think about it.” He said, “Go.” He said, “You're a fool.” He said, “It's history-making.” He said, “I wouldn't have gone out of my way to raise this much money without being a part of it.”

After that I said, “Man, I wasn't raising it to be a part of it. I was just thinking about them kids who had been so faithful and anxious to make the trip.”

And he said, "Come on and go."

And I went. And Ben Hill and B. S. Roberts are both now deceased, I'm the only African American preacher in Tulsa—

JE: Who was there.

GM: ...who was there on that march.

JE: Was it one or two buses? How many buses?

GM: We only had one bus.

JE: And so that was full of how many youngsters?

GM: I guess it was about forty people. There were other adults that were on there, about forty-passenger bus or something like that it was.

JE: So you heard Martin Luther King?

GM: I heard him, heard him in person.

JE: Were you close? Could you see him?

GM: Well, what happened, they marched from the Washington Monument to the Lincoln Monument on Centennial Boulevard. So I got off of the bus and marched down where the speech was being delivered. Then I walked on back to the bus and sat on the bus with the late Reverend Ben Hill, he was crippled, he was. We sit there on the bus. It was amplified, you know, and I could hear it all. And I heard it from just sitting there on the bus, rather than standing in the crowd.

JE: What was your impression when you heard the speech?

GM: I was impressed by the singing, the songs that were sung. And then I thought it was the most dynamic speech that I'd ever heard. And then I've heard it so many times since, you know, being played back. But it was a great speech. And so many practical things that was said.

JE: Nobody at that time could have known that that was going to be a speech that was going to linger on.

GM: No, no, no, nobody would have ever known that.

JE: Right. But some of the words of the speech were, "But one hundred years later, the negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the change of discrimination. One hundred years later, the negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity." And it goes on.

GM: Yeah.

JE: From that day to this day, some has changed but still we have change today.

GM: Yeah, well, some has changed. We've come a long way, let me put it like this, but we still have a long ways to go. I think that even there's a part that we as African Americans have to play. And then there's a part that the total America has to play.

But I'm glad to be alive today to witness the first African American president of the United States. I mean, I never thought that I'd live to see that. And I agonize over some of my friends who have passed on who were involved in the civil rights movement, who died before they got to see their dream come true.

One of the things that I've learned and that I've always said, and I got one speech that I preach, "If you don't push, nothing moves." And, "Freedom, you know, is not necessarily going to be granted by the oppressor, but it has to be demanded by the oppressed." I mean, there's some things that we have to do in order to—

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

GM: ...see a better day for ourselves. Sometimes we can just settle, you know, we can quit too soon, you know.

JE: Yeah.

GM: I think that America has come a long ways from what it was even fifty years ago or less than fifty years ago.

JE: Here's another line from the Martin Luther King speech: "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." Do you think that that's something that's unattainable?

GM: Uh, I think it is.

JE: That is attainable that—

GM: I believe it is attainable because I think even in this day and age people now are just people. I mean, I see it. Maybe I'm liberal in my thinking, I try not to be prejudiced against anyone. Even back in those days, I told someone, "That if I was prejudiced I was prejudiced against prejudice." So I believe that even in this day and age a person is not necessarily judged by the color of their skin but the content of their character.

I remember some lines that my mother told me when I was a child. "Manners and good behavior can carry you further than money."

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

GM: I remember that so very much.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

GM: I thought, I think that there's a responsibility on the part of everyone to, to be right. And if you're right, folk will respect you for that. That's my attitude about it, yeah.

Chapter 13 – 3:18**MLK in Tulsa**

John Erling: Did you consider joining other marches of Martin Luther King?

Dr. G. Calvin McCutchen: That was the only march that I ever participated in with Martin Luther King. Of course, when he came to Tulsa, I've forgotten what year it was, I was one of the sponsors that helped get him here, it was in the '60s. He came to Tulsa and we arranged for him to be the speaker at our afternoon session at First Baptist Church North Tulsa, there on Greenwood.

The late Reverend T. Oscar Chappelle, Sr., and myself took him in an automobile and drove him to Oklahoma City across the turnpike. They had a motor caravan waiting at the turnpike. We took him across the turnpike. He got out of our car and we came on back to Tulsa. They took him from there and he had a rally in Oklahoma City.

JE: You had time then to talk to him on the—

GM: Yes, yes, and then another time I had a chance to talk with him in person, being a Baptist he was a member of the National Baptist Convention USA Incorporated. And he was one time the advice president of the National Baptist Congress of Christian Education, of which I'm a part. And I remember one time I had a chance to talk with him and it took me by surprise. The late Reverend Chappelle of Morningstar Baptist Church, that Mordecai Johnson, one of the national black leaders was coming to be the special guest at the Congress of Christian Education, and he asked me to drum up some preachers to march with him. In a great big auditorium, you know, you would get a group of preachers who would just line up and march in with him, you know, the outstanding speaker. And the was a honor, you know, part of the preachers be able to march in the line with him. And I remember having to lean on fifty or sixty preachers to get in line to march with him.

And I'm thinking that since I'm the one that all these guys together I'm going to be the one to march in with Mordecai Johnson.

Then out of nowhere came Martin Luther King. And he came to head out—I never told nobody that, but he came up there and took my place in there and I had to get by to march and I was up front, but that was just one experience.

JE: And you had no idea he was in town or—

GM: Well, I knew he was there but I thought he would be already on the platform.

JE: Okay.

GM: But I think that even then it was the way that he got some visibility.

JE: Do you recall when you rode in the car or anything else any particular conversation or what you talked about with him? Or can you describe him?

GM: Well, it's been so long.

- JE:** Right, right.
- GM:** I can't recall.
- JE:** But in person, just talking to him, was he—
- GM:** Just talking to him he was an average person to talk with, an ordinary person. I mean, you know, he was a good conversationalist but he didn't just talk about race or prejudices. Just talked as any other person would.
- JE:** Right.
- GM:** We just chatted as we drove him across the turnpike.
- JE:** But then when he'd get behind a pulpit that's when he transformed into something special?
- GM:** Yes, yes.
- JE:** And charismatic.
- GM:** That's right, yes.
- JE:** So he was a pleasant nice person?
- GM:** He was a pleasant nice person, he was.

Chapter 14 - 7:47

He Tried

- John Erling:** We're sitting in what is known as the G. Calvin McCutchen Center. You had a 1984, \$550,000 bond program for this family life center.
- Dr. G. Calvin McCutchen:** Right, right.
- JE:** Which had to have a tremendous impact then on the church? Did it bring in other people or young people or how did that affect—
- GM:** Well, anytime a church do an improvement project, for several years many folk will join and some members who have probably gone off and left the church came back. But we made tremendous sacrifices in paying for this building. We had floated a bond program.
- JE:** So you needed to take in \$4,000 per week.
- GM:** Per week.
- JE:** A Sunday.
- GM:** A Sunday.
- JE:** And how many people are in the congregation that you're asking from?
- GM:** Well, we at least four hundred folk at that time, at least active, four hundred active members. Our membership before the moving of folk from urban renewal, we had had as many as seven hundred members.

JE: That was asking a lot of four hundred people, wasn't it?

GM: Yeah.

JE: And were there wealthy people there?

GM: Not all that wealthy but folk made some sacrifices. And not once during a period of, say, two years or more did we ever miss a payment.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

GM: Monday morning we had to take two thousand dollars to the bank and not once did we miss in two and a half years. And then Bank First it was, looked at our pay record on retiring them bonds and helped us to retire them bonds. Gave us enough money to call them bonds in, retire those bonds. And we were able then to have a little more cash flow.

JE: So the church today doesn't have any major debt against it?

GM: Doesn't have any debt against it.

JE: In 2011.

GM: No.

JE: You've got really involved in the community, as we've already said. You wrote for the *Oklahoma Eagle* columns.

GM: Right.

JE: And I have a long list of things that you did. You conducted revivals, gave lecture courses, preached installation sermons for pastors, anniversaries—

GM: Right.

JE: You were so involved in the civil rights and in the community. This is interesting, in 2002, you and other pastors would walk the streets after the clubs closed at two o'clock in the morning because there had been problems here in the community.

GM: Oh, oh yeah. I joined, well, it's not in existence anymore, what they call a ten-point coalition group, it was, patterned after what were they doing in Boston, Massachusetts, to break up the violence in the community and to curb the drug rings and that sort of thing. We organized a ten-point group here in Tulsa. We did a lot of tutoring of students and that sort of thing. Amos Electric gave us one of his houses for a meeting place.

JE: Amos Electrical Mechanical.

GM: Amos Electrical Mechanical. Out late at night they had gathering places where a lot of young people would gather. It was the Cheek and Check out on Peoria. And late at night kids would be out there in droves, just hanging around out there. Sometimes we would go out there, a group of ministers, you know, go out there and just talk with them.

JE: Would they be interested in what you had to say?

GM: Yeah, some of them were. You know, I think the kids, some good kids, you know, but I think there was just a matter of being a weekend and have some place to hangout. Not violent or anything like that.

JE: Students listen to this of all walks of life, they'll listen to your story, what kind of advice do you give to students?

GM: Well, students from all walks of life, ministerial students and all, be true to yourself, be honest in your dealing with your fellow man, and then, of course, if you make some failures, try to be bigger than the mistake that you made.

And then I think what carried me even in my work up to now, even when I was struggling working my way through college, assign yourself. If you're working on a job, you don't have to wait for the boss to tell you what to do. There's no reason to be standing around idle doing nothing.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

GM: You know, you see a paper on the floor, the floor need to be mopped, a window need to be washed, get a bucket and go wash the window, you know, rather than to be standing around doing nothing. Assign yourself. And even in this church work. And I'm the only minister in all the years of Mt. Zion Church and Mt. Zion is 102 years old now, but the record will show that I'm the only one who to might have been made pastor that kept regular office hours. I decided that if everybody else got up and go to work, I'd get up and go to work too. My wife gets up and goes to work. I get up and go to work also.

That's the kind of thing that I would teach people to do.

JE: How would you like to be remembered?

GM: Um, that's a good question and I've already got it figured out. I told my wife, thinking up a good epitaph to put on my tombstone, I said, "I only want two words on it—he tried." He tried, that's all. I mean, you don't have to put on there that he was a steak and vegetable president. He served Mt. Zion fifty years and he's worked with the National Baptist on the national level for fifty some years. But just two words—he tried. That's about all I want to ask to be put on there because not everything that I put my hand to succeeded. And not everybody who I met I got along with. But I tried. I mean, not every sermon I preached was a good one. I can grant you that, but I tried. And I stayed on the job. And still, if I can't help you I won't hurt you.

There are ministers right now who are passing good churches who call me, you know, when they get in some bind or something, now even in sermon preparation. And they ask me, "McCutchen, what do I do here?"

And I'd say, "Man, come on by and let's kick it around." So I still have an office here at this church. They gave me the library down there and I refuse to put a phone in there because I have my cell phone. When I go in there I go in there and study.

JE: Well, I want to thank you for this time.

GM: Well, thank you, I'm glad to talk. And I appreciate it even being asked. The girl at the Greenwood Center—

JE: Frances Jordan.

GM: Frances Jordan called me and she said, “He said he wanted to talk to a preacher and you’re the only one I thought about.”

I said, “Well, okay.” She, of course, suggested that we would come there for the interview.

JE: Well, it was important I think that we did it here in this location.

GM: Well, that’s all right. I mean, I’m not—

JE: Because this is a real historical location—

GM: Yeah, yeah.

JE: ...where we are.

GM: Yeah.

JE: And because of a website and today’s technology now your story will be heard again and again and again.

GM: Well, I hope so but—

JE: Your sermon will be repeated again and again and again for generations to come.

GM: Well, well, that’s good.

JE: So thank you, Dr. McCutchen, I appreciate it very much.

GM: Well, I’m glad to be of help. And I’d better call my wife and tell her I haven’t gotten lost. Because she’s probably looking for me by now.

JE: Yeah, very good. Thank you very much.

GM: Well, that’s all right.

Chapter 15 - 0:33

Conclusion

Announcer: This oral history presentation is made possible through the support of our generous foundation-funders. We encourage you to join them by making your donation, which will allow us to record future stories. Students, teachers, and librarians are using this website for research and the general public is listening every day to these great Oklahomans share their life experience.

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