

Crystal Taylor
Current and Historical Rose Hill Gardens Resident
Route 9 Oral History Project

Interviewed by: Michael Emmons and Catherine Morrissey, Center for Historic Architecture and Design, University of Delaware
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Abstract

Crystal Taylor is a nearly lifelong resident of Rose Hill Gardens, a small subdivision along Route 9 with two-story duplex homes. Her parents purchased a home in the development around 1960—less than a decade following its construction—where they lived when she was born in 1962. She left the development for a stretch of four years for a nursing internship and job in North Carolina and then returned. Taylor currently lives in the same home in which she grew up.

Taylor recalls that her parents had lived in a small, one-bedroom apartment with her sister and an aunt and her family in either Millside or Southbridge before moving to Rose Hill Gardens. By comparison, her family was much more comfortable in their three-bedroom Rose Hill Gardens home. At the time, she asserts, many neighbors were moving from Millside or Southbridge to Dunleith and other neighborhoods along Route 9. Taylor does not recall her neighbors in Rose Hill Gardens having moved there from southern states.

In this interview, Taylor recalls growing up in Rose Hill Gardens, noting that her favorite thing about the neighborhood was her neighbors, whom she describes as forming a close-knit community where people helped each other. Residents in the subdivision held various occupations: there was a painter, a politician, hospital workers, a school nurse, a liquor store employee, a bank employee, and a receptionist, among others. Her own parents were a school custodian at P. S. DuPont High School and a hospital worker. Taylor describes how she and her Rose Hill Gardens friends spent their leisure time together on her next door neighbor's porch, a memory she reiterates throughout the interview. On occasion, she says, she and her friends would go to the mall, to get pizza, to the nearby Dairy Queen, or to a movie. They would play jump rope, jacks, and other games on their driveways. They also enjoyed playing board games. With one of her friends using a wheelchair, the girls found the wooded path to the nearby park in Dunleith impassable. Taylor remarks on the respect kids had for adults when she was growing up, saying that they would correct you if you said "something incorrect." She contrasts that with kids at present, who she says talk back to adults.

Taylor indicates that her neighborhood did not have a community center that was close by, so she and her friends stayed out of trouble on their porches. She notes that all of the community schools she attended as a child are gone, including Rose Hill Elementary and Dunleith School. She attended church in Dunleith but does not remember that as a focal point for the Rose Hill Gardens neighborhood, which did not have its own church. She remembers a community baseball team that played in the open field that later became a park. The civic association would hold a Labor Day cookout each year in the field, and she also remembers a Halloween party they organized one year.

As far as architectural alterations to the houses in her neighborhood, Taylor indicates that some people added dens to the rear of their homes over the years and recalls a two-story addition to the rear of one of the houses. In her own home, her family redid their kitchen and bathroom, made improvements to closet doors, painted, replaced windows and the roof, and put siding and stucco on the outside of the house. She says the main thing she would change about her home in Rose Hill Gardens is that she wishes it had a second bathroom. She also indicates that the house is currently “falling apart” and in need of various repairs.

While she was growing up, Taylor remembers that most of the surrounding neighborhoods were Black. She recalls Collins Park as a white neighborhood and Swanwyck as white with some Black families. She recalls encountering some racism at the local corner store, which she knew as “Esther and Sam’s store,” where she says the owners would watch the Black children closely when they came in. She remembered being accused of stealing a Tasty Cake there in about 1968, when she was in first grade, which she had not done. Taylor attended Delcastle High School. As one of only eight Black students in her school, she recalls encountering hostility from some white students.

In Taylor’s memory, all of the homes in her subdivision were owner-occupied by middle-class Black families when she was growing up in the 1960s and ‘70s. With the increase in rentals in her neighborhood in recent decades, Taylor laments the loss of neighborliness and says few people are interested in participation in the civic association, which still takes responsibility for snow removal. She attributes some of this to the purchase of homes by landlords who care most about extracting profit from their investments. She reflects on how the demographics of the neighborhood have changed in the past two or so decades to include more residents who are younger, lower income, and Hispanic. She indicates that she has seen some drug deals in Rose Hill Gardens and is unhappy with the dangerous speed at which people drive through her very small neighborhood, some apparently mistaking it for Rogers Road. This latter phenomenon resulted in a crash on her front lawn some years before.