



In collaboration with
Minister Teddy Keyes
 Piney Woods Elder

Date: March 26th, 2023

Interviewer(s): Rachel Kamis

00:00	Rachel Kamis	All right, so I'm recording we're recording. Let's start, start by just telling telling me about yourself?
	Teddy Keyes	I'm the son of the late Deacon William Joseph Keyes cousin to William Barber the Third because his daddy and his grandmama was brothers and sisters. No, no, no. My daddy and his grandma was brothers and sisters. It's not what I just said. Anyways, I was the, what, the 6th child's no the, seventh the seventh child out of 9.
	Rachel Kamis	Oh wow.
	Teddy Keyes	It was four girls and five boys in all of us is living now but two, one girl and one boy, still here my dad he was a deacon at this church as well. I was a deacon here before I became a minister. I teach Sunday school teach Bible study preaches whatever capacity that they need me in that's that's basically what I do. Even though even sometimes we even cook.
	Rachel Kamis	What do you cook?
	Teddy Keyes	Anything that they want: hot dogs, hamburgers, fish, Carla's cabbage anything We will barbecue pigs and all of that. Tt doesn't matter because when I was young, growing up in my parents house my mother she taught each and everyone of us how to cook and I believe that that's part of what this new generation need today is learn how to cook instead of going into the microwave beep beep popping it in there quick if we do this microwave stuff, you got a whole lot of [inaudible] stuff in it and people are just blowing out of proportion and we should get back to the old time where where there more cooking in the kitchen instead of going up to restaurant every day. Yeah. Because that's part of people

what they're doing now. You don't find too many people cooking in the kitchen today. They go out. When we was coming up. We had to go out and cut wood and bring it in and put in the stove. because we didn't have no gas stove in the beginning but as the time went on progress okay we cant forget about progress because what we have to move along with the time so as time went on, we moved from the wood stove to the gas and vice versa. Growing up we didn't have inside toilet. We had outside toilet.

03:58 Rachel
Kamis

Before you get too far. Do you mind just stating your name for the record?

Teddy
Keyes

My name is well they call me a minister but that really doesn't matter to me whether you call me a minister or by my real name. My name is Teddy Jerome Keyes the son of the late William Joseph Keyes and Rosalee Boston Keyes.

Rachel
Kamis

Thank you, Minister Keyes. And I wanted to ask so you said that it seems like growing up cooking, going outside and getting wet and kind of manning the land like that was a big part of your childhood. Can you tell me a bit more about that?

Teddy
Keyes

Growing up on the farm?

Rachel
Kamis

Yea sure.

Teddy
Keyes

Yeah, it was what we say farm life. This whole area matter of fact this place where we sitting at now was a farm. Grow crops here. But this was not where I did the farming I was brought back up into what we call piney woods further back up. Like I said we raised corn, soybeans, peanuts, cotton, tobacco the whole nine yards. Growing up we had chickens, ducks geese, turkeys guineas, goats, cow, horses mules we had it all. And see when we first started out we had to get out there with the mules. Walk behind the mules, plowing the field, getting it ready to plant the crops. And it was I guess round, maybe the late 60s, early 70s. Even before we even got what we call a tractor to go out there and get the field ready to plant the crops, we had to do all ours with mules. So you can imagine how long that to just to get the land prepared to plant the crops.

Then after you did that, then you had to get out there to with the ho and chop it Because of the weeds and stuff. We didn't have the facilities to go out there and spray it to keep the grass and weeds from growing. So

we had to get out there and chop. And I can remember [inaudible] was yesterday, for Fourth of July. You know how people love to celebrate on Fourth of July. My father would always tell us we gonna go out here today and we will work this field til around 12 o'clock. But as it happens to be we went out there and we worked up to 12 o'clock. And then we didn't have much more to do. So he said well we might as well stay out here and finish. So that's the way we did. even though we kind of thought that our parents were rough on us but they wasn't. That what helped us to be what we are today and see they didn't mind. The Bible lets us know if you spare the rod you spoil the child they didn't spare the rod. if you did wrong you got punished see that this day and time they want to say you gonna get in time out you got time out.

And like I said that's what kept us from going out here doing things that we shouldn't have done like going out here taking stealing stuff that wasn't belong to us. Our parents instilled in us. If it didn't belong to you. You saw something that you wanted you go ask for it they gave it to you all well, good. But if they didn't, you didn't you didn't bother because it was theirs and back then the people didn't even lock the door that's how safe it was. But now a days, you were not even safe in church. Cause you see people going killing people in churches. But back then you didn't have to worry about that.

Let's see. As I was saying, if you went out in the community and you did something wrong, we didn't have a telephone back then. But the grown ups, the adults could chastise you and punish you then. And then before we even got back home we could have left right there and go home before we got home like I said we didn't have a telephone. But when we got home our parents knew all about it.

09:06 Rachel
Kamis

Do you have any memories, memories of that happening?

Teddy
Keyes

Yes, okay. Me and my brothers. there was a time when we use some my brother's we was out and a man had a watermelon patch. So we wanted some watermelon. We wanted watermelon. So some of us went into the watermelon patch.

But the thing about that is was this some of them just took a watermelon and just busted it up. And then they say, "well, this didn't taste good." So they would take that watermelon and throw it away but me and my brother, we would if we busted a watermelon, we ate that watermelon. But they didn't do it and it got back to our parents.

So, this door summertime hot, too. So we had me and my brother, we were the only two who got punished. I don't know whether the other ones got punished or not. But me and my brother, we were the only ones

	<p>Rachel Kamis</p> <p>Teddy Keyes</p>	<p>that got punished. We had to go into this man's field, corn patch. And you know see the long leaves that they call them. And we had to pull that off what they called it fodder. We had to pull that out. And tie it up and he says he was gonna feed it to his cows, but he didn't do it. So we have to stay out there. All day long, hot. And that stuff would bother you. It would itch and scratch and all that But like I said, that [inaudible] that taught us a lesson from then on we told em. We say, y'all going somewhere? Y'all go along. Y'all go on by yourself. Because we not gonna stay there with you. We not gettin in trouble for something we tell you we know it's wrong but you continue to do it.</p> <p>That's fair. Yeah.</p> <p>So I can remember, one summer. We went up to what we call [inaudible] that's further up going back south. Called the [inaudible] there was this man. He was considered totally blind. He had a store.</p> <p>And we were going in there we were buying stuff. Some of them would try to fool him. They would give him \$1 and tell him they gave him \$10.</p> <p>But you couldn't fool that man, he could take that dollar bill and feel it and tell you exactly what you gave. So we can tell 'em and say y'all not gonna do this no more.</p> <p>Because you can't do wrong and get away with even though you might think you getting away with it here. But you got a higher power looking down upon you and that as God Almighty, and he sees all, and he knows all. So so we can't get away with that. We gotta do what God say to do or don't do it at all.</p> <p>Like I said this was a community that if you needed help, we was right there to help you. If somebody else needed help, we go there and helped. We didn't worry about getting paid for, for helping one another out. We were just that kind of a community a close knit community where the love was shown. We didn't just say I love you or just talk about love, we put it into action. We show love one to another.</p>
<p>13:10</p>	<p>Rachel Kamis</p> <p>Teddy Keyes</p>	<p>Thats really beautiful. I think you started to talk about this. But can you tell me more about how you're connected to the Piney Woods Free Union and your understanding of your family history here.</p> <p>Like I said, I was born 1955. So my next birthday I'll be 68. So in this community, even before I knew any thing about it, going back out toward 64, the place that they call [inaudible], and across the street from there. There was the church this church here. I can't</p>

think of the name but it was nondenominational church where Blacks, Indians and Whites all fellowship together and as the years went on and on they started to split up. Some of them went out what they call poplar chapel and that is when here Union Town was built. It's Been rebuilt remodeled over the years. It was a close knit community were everybody worked together for each other, helping one another out. Let's see there was a store. The corner store.

Here in the corner here. There was another store. And that was Andrew Pierce, he would like some like, he would go around during the week and find out what the people wanted for groceries. And then sometime during that week, he would get it together and bring it back to each person that he went to the house and got their order. And then as years went on, there's another store on this side,

Which was our cousin Brother Barber His cousin because well matter of fact. This is his great uncle, I believe is his great uncle. And the store was called Richard Roberson

Because Buster I'm just giving you nickname's now, Buster, Richard, and Bopsy?, they was brothers And Richard, he had moved away he left from here and went to I think it was Indianapolis. But then after a while he came back home. And he built the store right out here. That's there now. Well it went from him to someone else. And now it's being run by Beverly James, she got something like she do this jewelry, she gets in there now that she sells she goes on what you call it broadcasts on YouTube or somewhere like that. And then she sells this jewelry, she tells you about the jewelry and then you can call in and say whether you wanted that particular item or not. That's where its at now. Like I say, this road here, it used to be a saw mill down in this road, I forget who operated it and all that but it used to be a sawmill for the [inaudible]. Over the period, in time and years gone by this done, been done away with. So like I say this community was a close knit community. Helping each other would help one another out. Yeah, so

17:37

Rachel
Kamis

Growing up in the community in the tight knit community, who in your who in your family or amongst your family or friends who was particularly impactful in your life?

Teddy
Keyes

My parents . Because like I said, we was brought up in the church, it wasn't when we was going to say for instance, we'd said, we didn't want to come to church. And we said I'm sick and tired church, By the time church was out. All of a sudden you get well and then you want to go out and play. Not so you see you gonna stay in the house all day. Because you didn't want to go to church that morning, you thought you was getting away. Saying because you was sick that you can in the

evening after church service was over with you thought you was gonna be able to go out and play. No. You stay in the house all day long.

My parents was like this. If you did something wrong to them, they didn't hold it against you. And if you came, and you needed their help, they would stop what they was doing and help you out. Even though you'd done them wrong, see that's the kind of person that they were

They didn't hold something that you did against them because they say what, God didn't hold it against us. Because why we even [inaudible], we say that we belong to Him. We still do things that's wrong but he doesn't hold it against us. All we have to do is ask for forgiveness. And even even if they didn't ask for forgiveness, or anything like that they would help you when you need if you needed food. You had it if you needed it. That's the type of person my parents was. They didn't mind helping them out. Even though you you've done them wrong, they didn't mind. So my greatest influence was my parents

20:17

**Rachel
Kamis**

Teddy
Keyes

Sounds like they're, they were very selfless people do you feel like what are the ways that you, you carry on those lessons that you've learned in your life?

See just what they instilled in us that it doesn't matter what somebody else do to you. You have to be the bigger person to look beyond their faults. To you saying you go, you say you belong to Christ. So in order for you to belong to him, and do it his way, you have to forget about what they do to you. See, that's what Christ did for us he forgot about what we did to him.

He was a man that did no wrong. He didn't steal what somebody's saying more than saying that he hoped and bless. So they crucify him. So just what my parents instilled in us if they do you wrong. Even if you have done them wrong, sometimes you have to be the bigger person and go to them and say, Forgive me, even if you ain't even done nothing to them. You have to be the bigger person and go to them say forgive me. Ive done you wrong. So that's, that's the kind of parents that we had, that they instilled in us that no matter what. It doesn't matter. Yes. Because they did you wrong, you have to be the bigger person and say, you did me wrong, but I'm still gonna help you. And I'm still gonna look [out for you].

Thats a really important lesson for sure. Can you tell me a bit about what the legacy of Piney Woods Free Union means to you?

**Rachel
Kamis**

The legacy of Piney Woods Free Union was that this area here, there was no slaves in this area, that's why they call it Free Union. It was free,

	Teddy Keyes	<p>you didn't say that that's my master over there, or just I belong to this person over here, this community was free, you had the ability to do and that's how we became land overs because what we was free we was free to purchase land, even though you may help the White person out, that didn't mean that they owned you. Because why, this whole area here free union this community was free even to that point I have White cousins down here in what we call [inaudible]. Sometimes they don't want to recognize that you can get over the fact that we are kin. If we have God's children, we're all kin.</p> <p>Because why Adam and Eve was the parents of everybody. And then when Abraham came, God says, well, I'm gonna make you the father of many nations. So that means what we are all God's children. So if we have brothers and sisters in Christ, that makes all us kin. And that's how this whole area it was called Free Union because there was no slave in this area.</p>
24:15	Rachel Kamis	<p>And what was your experience of learning about that growing up like about your about the community's history what do you remember?</p> <p>It was where we could have the freedom to do what you wanted it to do to go and play with our cousins, we could go to their house and play and we didn't have to worry about being discriminated against in this community here. Because what it was free free union. That's one of the reasons why Jesus came to set all of us free. See, because we was all slaves to what to sin. But Jesus came and died on the cross and shed his blood. We didn't have to no longer stay under that slave [inaudible]. See, because when, when he went back, he told, told Moses to go down to Egypt and to tell Pharaoh to let my people go. He told him, so what tell them to kill our unblemished animal and put the blood over the door post. So when I come through there, when I see the blood, I'll pass over you. Because the first boy was gonna be smitten. See, he came. And when he died in the cross, that blood that he shed, was precious. It was, didn't have no contamination in it, it was pure. And so that's why we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, who gives us the ability to what to worship Him in spirit, every truth. And we are free from all the bondage of this world doesn't matter who you are, if you want him to be your savior, that's why he came to set each and everyone of us free. So we are free under the blood of Jesus Christ.</p>
26:36	Rachel Kamis	<p>Thank you for that. I feel like I should say, amen. So last question. Is there anything else about yourself, your family piney woods that you'd like to like to say you'd like to talk about?</p>

Teddy
Keyes

It's what I've been saying all awhile, this community here was, was free. And we all look, helping one another out. Because that's the way we was brought up. I help you, you help me. I can remember, sometimes when we have what we call hog killing, they will take each family would bring the hogs in one place, and they were all killed the hogs, then they would kill the hogs and clean it and cut it up. Each family. Even if you didn't have any hogs, that you could come and you could help out. And when you left, you carried meat back home with you. Because that's the way we were. That's the way it was. It didn't matter if had hogs, or [inaudible] or whatever, if you came there and participated. Even some time, if even if you didn't come, they would say sister so and so and brother John. They didn't come and they don't have no hogs or nothing. We gonna take some of this meat because we have more than enough. So we gonna take some of this meat that we have, and carry it and give it to them. And you didn't even charge them for it you just gave it to them. Because that was the love that you have for for your fellow man.

**Rachel
Kamis**

That's really, really beautiful and definitely someone like me who grew up in a city that's not something that happens, it's really amazing to see.

Alright Well, that's all I have for you. Mr. Keys. Thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. It was a pleasure.

Teddy
Keyes

God bless you. God bless you.

Likewise.

**Rachel
Kamis**

Yes, yes, yes.

Teddy
Keyes

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