

Interview with Ms. Queen featuring Debra Taylor, Mama Akua, and Emily

Total runtime: 1:35:05

PART 1

[[00:00:00]] - MS. QUEEN: We -- we don't know. See I graduated from High School in '51 -- January of '51. And the group that... uh... I ran with... we would do things like, uh, go to Ebenezer Church on Sunday Morning and run home. E-- Ebenezer Church was on Willis and Brush.

EMILY: Willis and Brush.

AKUA: Downtown.

MS. QUEEN: Mmm-hmmm. And we would uh, two girlfriends of mine Jean, Marilyn, and me. Every Sunday we would come home from church, change our clothes, and walk-- *(Phone rings)* Get that, baby. And walk to the Paradise Theater.

DEBRA: Now, where was that?

MS. QUEEN: Orchestra place. O-orchestra place and Woodward.

DEBRA: Oh, okay. So, that used to be a place where Black people --
(Tangent conversation between AKUA and MS. QUEEN)

MS. QUEEN: But we'd go down there and uh -- *(chuckles)* I developed, uh, um, um, a process where if I didn't get there for the front seat, I stayed until I got the front seat. And then I found out how to sneak around the back and talk to the entertainers -- whoever was there.

AKUA: At which, which uh --

MQ: Paradise Theatre...

AKUA: Oh, oh okay --

MQ: On Orchestra -- Orchestra and Woodward. And I jumped the seats. I just learned how to throw that leg over that seat and I did that 'til I got to the front.

(AKUA laughs)

MQ: And it worked.

DEBRA: And your friends did the same thing?

MQ: No, they waited for me in the back -- they chicken.

(EVERYONE laughs)

DEBRA: You were the brave one.

MQ: Yeah... and everything, I got so sick of them I didn't know what to do. But anyhow that was one-one thing that I did every week, I don't know for how long. But I loved entertainers and before we go --

DEBRA: Did you see Billie Holliday?

MQ: Oh, yeah.

DEBRA: Live before she passed?

MQ: Ooh, yeah.

D: That was my dad's favorite.

MQ: Ooh, yeah.

D: He had a crush on her...

MQ: Oh, yeah. She was somethin'.

D: I heard.

MQ: Yes, indeed. Her and that Dinah Washington.

(Long pause)

D: And Brook Benton.

(D begins to sing.)

MQ: Woo, that boy could hug good too.

AKUA: We listened to all them records.

MQ: *(Laughs at D's singing)* Stop.

A: Mama, was playin' them records --

(MQ and D break into laughter)

A: On Sunday she played Mahalia Jackson--

[[00:03:00]] - A: But during the week it was all of them.

(D continues to sing, A joins in on the song.)

A: I c'aint remember all the words but --

(D and MQ finish the song.)

D: I heard that stuff all my childhood -- my dad. Yep, so yeah...

A: So, you 'gon show her this book?

EMILY: Yeah, yeah. If you wanna look through it. So, it's--

D: So, I guess we need to uh -- Oh, I'm sorry. The only thing I wanted to say to give her a framing before she looks at all that is - we have to expand what its migration patterns from Black Bottom, definition of Black Bottom, so that what is traditionally considered Black Bottom is what the officials have declared. But if it's something different socially, et cetera, then culturally then we may have to expand the migration patterns between when people left the Black Bottom - those who were there -- Where did -- what communities did they relocate to? How did they migrate and how did they interact with Black Bottom?

MQ: The way that they moved from Black Bottom... was slow. And after -- after '43 and after the uh, West 7--

D: That happened in '43.

MQ and A: Right. Uh-huh.

MQ: With the tanks and things. And I sat, I got permission -- I've always done this. Get permission and to do -- do whatever I was gonna do. And don't take it for granted, I could do it. And when I was 10-years-old in '43 I asked -- there was a fish market on the corner of Garfield and Hastings, Mr. Poole.

D: Mr. Poole?

MQ: Mr. Poole. P-O-O-L-E. Poole. And I went to ask him if I could sit in the store and look through the mirror and watch the tanks and the soldiers go by. So he said yeah, so I had to go then ask my mother. But, uh, that was --

A: Wow.

MQ: At 10 years old you don't attach anything to that -- "ooh I saw a tank" -- you know. You come up with no reasoning for that, or anything.

D: Right. It's just exciting or different --

MQ: And then I told some of the kids that I saw up -- I was up at Mr. Poole's and they wanted to go to Mr. Poole's and he wouldn't let 'em. So, you know, what that did to me.

(D chuckles)

[[00:06:00]] - MQ: Uh, I wasn't enthused about that, at all. 10 years old, what do I care about a tank going down Hastings? You know. As I got older, I made the association with '67 and '43.

And I-I wasn't - I've never been enthusiastic about that. Some people say I'm losin' my mind or somethin', but--

D: Enthusiastic about?

MQ: About the Riots.

D: Mmm-hmm.

MQ: '43 and '67, why am I worried about that? They didn't bother my stuff. *(Laughs)* You know, that's a rather self-selfish attitude but otherwise you worry yourself to death. You know, about -- oh -- like the people were doing. Oh, are we gonna be safe in our homes? Um, those -- those policemen are uh, are all white. You know and... I never was enthused about that. I didn't want to become interested in that. In '67, I had a job taking care of my children, mindin' my business. You know, that kinda stuff. I-- I have never been a... I-- I was a neighbor until I got half to 50, 55-years-old. I had somethin' else to do.

D: So, what did you do for a living?

MQ: I worked for um, um... Let me see who did I work for?

A: When?

MQ: Yeah, okay I'll start out. I worked for the government. *(Clears throat)*

D: Federal?

MQ: Federal government and I then went to Wayne -- Wayne State University and I graduated from there. And then I was asked to accompany one of the supervisors to W-Wayne County Community College and I worked there. And I did a lot of uh, *(chuckles)* political stuff with her *(refers to AKUA)* best friend Mr. Coleman Young.

A: Mmm...

(MQ laughs)

(At [[00:08:19]] a tangent conversation with AKUA on her experiences working with Coleman Young lasts until [[00:09:30]] and transitions to MS. QUEEN's introduction)

MQ: My name is Queen C. Dooley and I have two or three other names h-- hitched onto that. We won't worry about that.

D: And where you lived in.

MQ: I lived, uh -- I was born on *(sighs)* Russell and Forrest. I moved to 934 Garfield near Ha-- Hastings. That was a very interesting part of my life, as I grew and came back. I-- I didn't leave Hastings until they moved to be the expressway.

D: Okay. What year was that? Oh, I mean, what phase -- period?

(MQ laughs)

D: What that have been uh, late 50's, early 60's?

E: 60's right?

A: 'Cause first they had to tell y'all to move - that was the question.

MQ: Yeah, we had to move and uh, my grandma moved to McLaren and Forest. And I -- where did I move to? 3148 Canton on the Westside -- Eastside. That was Eastside. I didn't do too much movin' to the Westside. I didn't like the Westside. But I did move 5737 30th Street. Went to New Light Baptist Church and taught Sunday School there.

D: Oh, who was that pastor back in uh--

MQ: Martin.

D: Uh, no in the 70's. Were you there in the 70's?

MQ: Oh, no.

D: Okay. It was uh, I'm tryin' to remember his name. He's gone on to glory now.

A: Mmm-hmm.

MQ: Martin-- Martin was his last name.

D: Okay.

A: Where was that located?

MQ: 30th and Cobb.

D: So, not Grand River where--

MQ: Mmm-hmm.

A: Oh, no.

D: Okay.

MQ: 30th and Cobb. We didn't do nothin' on Grand River.

A: Most folks moved from -- as you found out -- moved from over there to over here... you know. People follow -- well, I guess-- What?

MQ: Well, I think a lot of people think that people moved from the Black neighborhood to the white neighborhood. That's a lie. You can put that in there too.

(E chuckles)

MQ: But um, they moved a little bit at a time.

D: Mmm-hmm.

MQ: The people that had to move from Hastings moved...

[[00:12:00]] - MQ: Uh, further to the Eastside.

A: Like they moved maybe to the Northend or somethin' and then they moved.

MQ: And then they -- then they moved depending on their age and children and all that stuff. Then they might move to the Westside, maybe. That was a maybe. That wasn't something -- well, that's okay, we'll just move to the West -- they lied.

D: So, you're saying there were some barriers that prevented people from having free reign to move where they wanted to move. Can you talk about that a little bit?

(Long pause)

MQ: East uh, Eastside people -- *(taps table)* the majority of them stayed on the Eastside. Okay? And that means they were um... East of Woodward Ave.

D: Mmm-hmm.

MQ: That's right ain't it?

D: Mmm-hmm. It divides East and West.

MQ: Then *(clears throat)* they stayed there awhile and then they moved further East. Then that's when they moved West. That's like when I moved West.

D: Would you see that in um, I guess the point I'm-- I'm trying to make -- the question -- I guess I could have been more specific is, the factors that contributed to that. Uh, would it have been housing covenants? Would it have been unspoken discrimination? Would it have been uh, economic--

MQ: Discrimination-- discrimination was always talked about.

D: Okay.

MQ: That wasn't something that white folks talked to Black folks, or Black folks talked to white folks. They'd talk about it. Talk about it in the barbershop, or the beauty shop, or J.L. Hudson's. Didn't really matter. But, when it came up, it came up. And people were not uh, as afraid of um... discrimination. As they are now. 'Cause they're a pain in the butt now. Excuse my French. *(Chuckles)* But their -- they coming with a lot of -- a lot of more reasons now people are moving to... out there. And out there.

A: Where were you born Queen, excuse me.

MQ: Detroit, Michigan.

A: That's-- that's what I wanted to hear.

MQ: Children's Hospital.

A: 'Cause I think it makes a difference.

MQ: Yeah.

A: In terms of your life experience.

EVERYONE: Mmm-hmm.

A: If you were born here versus like Ma 'n them came here.

MQ: Then you have relatives.

A: Yeah.

MQ: My grandparents were here. And my uh, (*chuckles*) my great-grandfather, my grandmother's father was a sl-- uh, whatchacallit -- slave owner in Mississippi. And uh, he lost his plantation and my grandmother moved him here.

(*Long pause*)

[[00:15:00]] - MQ: That was the wrong thing. 'Cause I didn't like him... So, I did things like -- I must've been 8, 9-years-old when he had to come here. She brought him a wheel -- a wheelchair -- a rocking chair. My question, 'How come you didn't buy my mommy a rocking chair?'

(*Long pause*)

A: Now, he was white.

MQ: Yes! (*Groans*)

A: I-- I just want you to say it, that's all.

MQ: Yes. And he would cross his legs all the time. He was 6-feet-6. Had long hair, just beautiful hair. (*Mimics Grandfather*) 'Come here girl and comb my hair!'

D: Mmm.

A: See-- see, those the stories you don't hear.

D: Mmm-hmm.

MQ: And: 'Okay!' I get the comb. I am one, two, three person. I might do it twice but I ain't 'gon do it a third time. You see, whatever it is. Did it twice. 'Come here girl and comb my

hair!' I took the scissors in there. (*Pantomimes hair-cutting*). And I cut it -- it was about right here. And I cut a little bit over here. Then I... leave it long right here. And I cut a little bit -- something about that long. He never said thank you. That really pissed me off. So, uh, my grandmother didn't say anything to me and so I figured, we needed me to talk about it. I'm 89-years-old. Who cares? So, anyway... he died finally. But um...

D: How did, um-- So, for your family... was there anyone back in the history that was the first to come to Detroit and if so, where did they come from and when-- what was it approximately?

MQ: My um... grandfather's mother and father -- I don't know where they came from. I got pictures of them upstairs.

D: The Black ones, or the white ones?

MQ: The Black ones.

D: Okay.

MQ: That -- these only one of my ancestors that were white.

D: Mmm-hmm.

MQ: And uh--

D: They were married.

MQ: Yeah.

D: Okay.

MQ: Yeah. And um--

E: Where were they from?

MQ: I don't know.

E: You don't know.

MQ: I've got pictures. I got one big picture of my grandfather's, uh, mother and father. And that's all. I don't remember any history about them, or where they were living or any of that. And I really didn't care.

D: Mmm.

MQ: Um-

[[00:18:00]] - A: You just knew about them because he came here.

MQ: No, that was my *grandmother's* father who came here.

A: Okay. Okay.

MQ: I never-- I don't remember ever seeing my grandfather's mother and father except the picture.

A: Okay.

E: I see.

MQ: K? And um... my daddy's... father helped my mother raise me. After he got out of jail. And he went to Kentucky. Maizeville, Kentucky. And he took me to Mazilique which was a little city of... Maizeville. And his father had a farm. Black-Indian, really. And uh, he took me down to Kentucky on the bus. D-- day after school closed. And brought me back the day school was gonna open. And he taught me things that I never will forget. How to feed the chickens, how to milk the cows, how to ride a horse, how to plant, and how to pick it after it got ch-- That was an experience I never will forget. And he always talked soft. *(MQ pauses then mimics her grandfather's voice)* Charlita! Whenever he called me Charlita... I did somethin'. And my mother did that too until she passed. She had a thing -- 'I beg your pardon.' And she'd mess with my momma's finger and my grandma's finger.

D: Hmm.

MQ: *(Sighs)* She raised me with, 'I beg your pardon.' And I raised my two children with 'I beg your pardon.' And I've got great ch- uh, grandchildren I raised with 'I beg your pardon.'

D: Is that a way of gaining respect?

MQ: Yes. You don't have to beat kids to death.

D: Mmm-hmm.

MQ: That's what she used to tell me. *(Mimics mother)* 'I don't need to whip you. You need a whipping, though. But you -- you know what we should do -- that finger. You know what we should do?' What Mommy? 'I think you don't need to play baseball today and tomorrow. And maybe we can talk about it.' *(Hits the table)* Pissed me off but I didn't care. Ha! She didn't care either. *(Laughs)*

A: 'Cause you didn't no whoppin'.

MQ: Hey, I got some whippins now.

[[00:21:00]] - MQ: I had to pick the switch. I had to go -- I had to go for that.

(A and MQ speak simultaneously)

MQ: Yeah, I'd go and get one like that.

(D chuckles)

MQ: (*Mimics relative*) 'Now baby, you know you -- you know you got the wrong switch.' Yes ma'am. 'Why don't you go back and try again.'

D: Uh-oh. (*Chuckles*)

MQ: 'Dummy... Do I have to go down there when you with to pick that switch?' No, ma'am. So, I go get the right one. So, she'd braid 'em together. So, it was a little while before I got another one. But she'd do that.

D: So the grandparents that you do know... uh their origins here that uh, migrated here they -- what state were they from?

MQ: I don't have the slightest idea.

D: Either side?

MQ: No. The ones from my mother's side -- my father's side was from Kentucky.

D: Okay.

MQ: And the ones from uh... My mother's side, my grandmother's side. Then the other ones from Kentucky - on my father's side... Yeah.

D: So, they both had some roots in Kentucky.

MQ: Yeah.

D: Okay. Just on the other side of the Mason-Dixon line.

(*MQ chuckles*)

D: Um, do you see uh... So, you were born and raised in Detroit.

MQ: Yes.

D: Um... and Hastings Street -- well, not formally a part of quote-unquote Black Bottom. What do you see as the uh-- What was the culture like at Hastings Street? What was the nightlife like? What kind of people hung out there? How did -- you're comfortable to say whatever your interaction or role was and how people viewed that time and that era?

MQ: They didn't think about it.

D: But looking back--

MQ: It's not something--

D: But looking back.

MQ: Hmm... There were clubs to go to.

D: Uh-huh.

MQ: And of course I... don't remember all of them. But I went to all of them.

D: You remember some of the names?

MQ: Oh, let's see here... Mary's Bar.

D: Okay.

MQ: Uh... hmm... Euclid and Russell. Royal Blue. Royal Blue Lounge.

D: Royal Blue.

MQ: Apex Bar.

D: Oh, it's comin' back now. *(Laughs)*

MQ: Uh... *(MQ asks a tangent question and someone replies)* Oh... Um, Oakland. There were a lot of bars on Oakland.

D: Uh-huh.

MQ: Uh, North of the Boulevard.

D: Yeah.

MQ: There were a lot of bars on um, John R.

[[00:24:00]] - D: Uh-huh.

MQ: And that's where the whores and the-- and the pro-- the prostitutes and the pimps--

D: Okay--

MQ: Were.

D: That's where they hung out.

E: On John R.

D: So--

MQ: On John R between uh-- Hey, Snoop.

SNOOP: Hello.

MQ: That's my -- that's my other child.

D: Okay. Hello.

SNOOP: You wanna talk about Black Bottom? Okay, let me tell you about it, okay.

D: Okay.

(MQ laughs)

MQ: *(Slaps hands)* Please, tell 'em!

SNOOP: She was around for all of it... That's all I can tell you.

(EVERYONE laughs)

SNOOP: She know everybody.

MQ: *(Laughs)* I did. I did.

D: So, where there certain kinds of people that hung out at certain ones of the clubs?

MQ: Yeah.

(EVERYONE speaks simultaneously)

D: Like you just told us the whores and the pimps hung out on John R--

MQ: John R and Oak -- and on Oakland.

D: Okay.

MQ: North of the Boulevard, all the way to...

A: Highland Park.

MQ: Yeah... Yeah, Highland Park on one side and Hamtramck on the other side.

A: Like a little sq-- square.

MQ: Yeah, little circle towns.

E: And when was that - like what years would you say?

MQ: Oh, let me - maybe I... get it better. I uh, was playin' around for- *(Chuckles)*

A: You wanna cover your ears?

SNOOP: I already know.

(EVERYONE laughs)

S: I know who my daddy is.

(More laughter)

D: Uh-oh.

MQ: Ooh, and that's a story, baby. Ooh, Lord have mercy. Hmm... That was the finest man I ever knew.

D: Really?

MQ: I'm tellin' you.

D: Uh-oh. *(Chuckles)* So, now that made you lose your train of thought. You-- *(Laughs)*

MQ: Ooh, did I?

(D continues to laugh)

MQ: Girl...

D: Uh, we were uh-- What were we talkin' about at that point, uh...

MQ: The names of the clubs I-- I'm--

E: What the clubs were like.

D: Yeah, what they were like.

E: What the different clubs were like.

D: Yeah, what they were like when certain people went to certain ones.

MQ: Now, I'll tell you somethin'. You want to go downstairs?

D: What's downstairs?

MQ: Pictures.

E: Oh, yeah.

D: Okay.

MQ: Come on.

END

[[00:26:23]]

PART 2

[[00:00:00]] - MQ: These are pictures of uh-- I don't know how we get a light over here.

(MQ talks to D, A, and E about the water in the basement until [[00:00:32]])

MQ: These are pictures... that I've got when I was playin' the clubs.

D: Is that-- that's not you? That's somebody--

MQ: Dinah Washington.

D: Okay.

MQ: Duke Ellington.

D: Wow.

MQ: It's me and my husband. Meet my husband. This is the Blues group that we belonged-- that I developed -- Michigan Blues Preservers.

D: I love these old club pictures. I'm tryna find my parents.

MQ: These are--

D: You know, everybody back then had those-- those kinda scenes.

A: Oh yeah, my mother got the Rusfeldt's Lounge.

MQ: These are-- That's El-- oh, what is the name?

MQ & D: Corner of Mack and Russell. It's a nice little sitting area down here.

MQ: Yeah, a party area.

(Overlapping conversation)

MQ: This is a trip we went on. Took a cruise. The club went on a cruise.

E: That's awesome.

MQ: That's me and my mommy.

E: So, the Michigan Blues Preservers?

MQ: That's right. The Michigan Blues Preservers.

D: Wait, where's her and her mom? Right here? Is this it here? *(A brief pause)* Is that you on the right?

MQ: I'm the youngest looking.

D: Uh-huh.

(A laughs)

D: Look like somebody went on a cruise or somethin'.

MQ: Now, I'm tryna to remember who this is -- but that's Count Basie.

D: Wow, Dinah Washington. This is a good one to get a copy. Did you get the Duke Ellington and Dinah Washington?

(E mentions her camera is not working and D responds)

MQ: Count Bessie. That's the-- this is the one that always uh, turns his back when he-- when he uh, plays. Who is that? Who is that? He's a Jazz guy.

D: Let me see, I'll probably know. Maybe. *(Chuckles)*

MQ: He always turned his back.

D: Oh, Miles Davis. I took my Dad to see him at Ford Auditorium.

MQ: Okay.

D: Mmm-hmm. Dennis Archer.

MQ: Yes.

D: Mmm.

MQ: Ella Fitzgerald.

E: Wow.

D: I saw her live-

MQ: Count Basie.

D: At the-- What's the place in D.C.? Uh?

MQ: The Kennedy Center?

D: Yeah. Thank you. Kennedy Center.

S: I just there last week.

D: Really?

S: My niece got married.

