

An Interview with  
**Pamela Talley**

at *The Historical Society of Missouri* St. Louis  
Research Center, St. Louis, Missouri

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**Oral History Program**

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## PREFACE

The interview was taped on a placed on a tripod. There are periodic background sounds but the recording is of generally high quality.

The following transcript represents a rendering of the oral history interview. Stylistic alterations have been made as part of a general transcription policy. The interviewee offered clarifications and suggestions, which the following transcript reflects. Any use of brackets [ ] indicates editorial insertions not found on the original audio recordings. Physical gestures, certain vocal inflections such as imitation, and/or pauses are designated by a combination of italics and brackets [ ]. Any use of parentheses ( ) indicates a spoken aside evident from the speaker's intonation, or laughter. Quotation marks ["" ] identify speech depicting dialogue, speech patterns, or the initial use of nicknames. Em dashes [—] are used as a stylistic method to show a meaningful pause or an attempt to capture nuances of dialogue or speech patterns. Words are *italicized* when emphasized in speech or when indicating a court case title. Particularly animated speech is identified with **bold** lettering. Underlining [   ] indicates a proper title of a publication. The use of underlining and double question marks in parentheses [   (??) ] denotes unintelligible phrases. Although substantial care has been taken to render this transcript as accurately as possible, any remaining errors are the responsibility of the editor, Josephine Sporleder.

Pamela Talley: ...Pamela Talley.

Malaika Horne: First, talk about growing up and your family and remember to talk about your parents, siblings, other relatives and then your children.

Pamela Talley: I was born and raised in the City of St. Louis, initially in the Ville area on Mathid. I don't remember the hundred but my family moved to the near south side, parents divorced when I was young and so I had younger siblings. I'm the oldest girl of seven kids and I'm the second oldest. I'm stumbling around this, I feel.

Malaika Horne: That's okay.

Pamela Talley: So I am the second oldest and the oldest girl and so after my parents' divorce, my mom had a job as a grocery clerk and so the family moved from Mathid to the near south side in Hickory and she worked not far from where we lived at the time. And so I think those are some of my earliest memories in terms of community, was just this whole divorce and me helping to take care of my siblings and in a sense, just a bit aware of how much of a role community could play because needed something to do. They needed safe places to play. They needed friends, so there was a playground not far from where we were. You needed neighbors to help and those kinds of things. I can truly say that my mom was very active in our education, very active in PTA and when I look back, that, I think, also made a difference for me and was a great role model for being involved.

Malaika Horne: Was it all girls?

Pamela Talley: No, it was not all girls. It was three girls and four boys, there was seven of us.

Malaika Horne: She had a lot on her hands.

Pamela Talley: She had a lot on her hands and she needed all the help she could get. Dad would come by and bring money, groceries, take us to the store so he was still very much involved and she always said that he was a good father; he just wasn't a good husband. But he, too, when I look back, because of his...he was, again, very conscious politically, he was in World War II, very conscious of race relations. We'd have a lot of conversations and especially probably the last 30 years, all these wonderful conversations about politics on the local, state and federal level. So he

was always engaged in that kind of conversation. For probably most of the siblings, we are all involved and I think it's, without a doubt, because of our parents.

Malaika Horne: And your children?

Pamela Talley: I have a daughter, have one daughter. I had a daughter very young. I was 16 years old, became a mom and I do understand the dynamics of that. Part of that was the whole relationship between the parents' relationship falling apart, the pressures on me to help take care of siblings. There was just a lot of dynamics that was going on at the time but I love her dearly. She's wonderful. She also helps to take care of her mom as her mom helped to take care of her. So I often thought when I was younger, having her was not such a super burden because I was already taking care of my siblings so she just came along with the siblings.

Malaika Horne: Do you think being the oldest and then your daughter influenced your leadership?

Pamela Talley: It did, without a doubt, influence my whole being because, probably had I not had a child at a young age...it made me be more responsible and not rebellious. So I could have easily become...and I do look back and there were times I was a little angry about having to take care of my siblings, especially when I went to high school because there was a period in my mom's life when she was sick, diabetic, they weren't, at that time, not a lot and so I was cooking and washing and getting kids off to school for months so, having the child, made me more responsible and not leave. I frequently talk to people and hear them say, well, their older sister ran away or their older sister got married and left. Well, because I had a child, I didn't because I wanted my child in spite of...I wanted her to have a stable of a life as possible. So I think it absolutely influenced me with understanding the importance of nesting ability and trying to build from there, yeah.

Malaika Horne: What does your daughter do?

Pamela Talley: She's in the healthcare field as well.

Malaika Horne: Because you're a nurse by training.

Pamela Talley: I am a nurse, have a Master's in nursing and a psychiatric mental health clinical nurse specialist or they actually say a nurse practitioner. So I'm a psych mental health nurse practitioner. Currently I work at Chip's Health & Wellness Center for people who are uninsured and under insured. But my daughter's in the healthcare field as well. She did not want to be a nurse but she started off in patient accounts and she does research and scheduling at her job at Orthopedic Association. She's invaluable. She's one of these people who float from department to department and they seem, for the most part, to love her because she's just, she's so helpful and useful. So she's doing well. She's pretty independent. She has a house. She's doing okay. She's really doing okay. She probably takes better care of her mom, you know, like technology, all those things she thinks I need to have, she gets those things.

Malaika Horne: What elementary and secondary schools did you go to?

Pamela Talley: I went to Attucks on the near south side and when I left Attucks, because it went to 7<sup>th</sup> grade or so, and then I went to Chouteau, again, which was the near south side. I would truly say there, at Chouteau, was already a reader and I just think had a number of teachers who, from Attucks, were just nurturing, but I have subsequently talked to several of the teachers and they said they had such a wonderful parents group and I thought that...you know, I had this sense that all the schools that parents were engaged in and involved and all this, so I had a teacher, Miss Dixon, maybe about 10 years ago, to say to me that Attucks was an exception, was really an exception in terms of the level of involvement of parents and the kids. So, I was a reader as a child and when I went to 8<sup>th</sup> grade, had a teacher who really exposed me more to black books.

Malaika Horne: Any in particular?

Pamela Talley: That I can remember, Malcolm X, Roots, Man Child in the Promised Land, some of those kinds of things I started reading in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, yeah.

Malaika Horne: And what high school?

Pamela Talley: I went to McKinley High School.

Malaika Horne: Is that still open?

- Pamela Talley: It is but it's a junior academy or something, a magnate school or something very different, yeah.
- Malaika Horne: So, when you were a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?
- Pamela Talley: I always thought I wanted to be a scientist, in the labs, you know, test tubes, all of those things were some of the visions I had of me. So when I did go to college and I majored in biology initially right here at UMSL, my mother was very practical and she would say, "Well, what are you going to do with a biology degree?" and I was like, "I'm going to work in a lab"; "Doing what?" So part of it was like, "Well, you need to do something with it. You need to do nursing or something more practical because being in the lab is not practical."
- Malaika Horne: So you went to UMSL and then did you go to nursing school?
- Pamela Talley: At St. Louis U so I did year here in biology and I transferred over to St. Louis U in nursing, yeah.
- Malaika Horne: So, growing up, were you considered...I know that you were a leader in your family but outside of the home, were you considered a leader?
- Pamela Talley: Probably by the time I got in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, I was a bit more of a leader, and now that I think about it, there were...well, one, there's a lot of cliques in middle school, when you think about it, and probably was a leader in that little clique I was a part of, but I do remember that we had a bullying community and it was a young man and he wasn't much older than us, probably the same age, in our grade actually, and he was terrorizing and beating people up pretty often and one of the things that we did...I remember kind of organizing this group of girls. I remember some of who they were now but we beat him up. So we beat up the bully and that shamed him enough that he stopped beating people up.
- Malaika Horne: That was a great leadership lesson.
- Pamela Talley: Yes.
- Malaika Horne: What did you get out of that? In fact, I probably have that question later on about leadership lessons. What did you get out of that experience?
- Pamela Talley: Well, that even the bully can be taken down. That's the story of David and Goliath, you know? They don't come too big, you know? But yeah,

we really did and he stopped bullying and terrorizing people. I think he was taking people's money. So for him to get beat up by a group of girls was...

Malaika Horne: It sounds like a sense of empowerment.

Pamela Talley: Well, of course, yeah.

Malaika Horne: It sounds like your mother encouraged you inside the home but there could be others, so if there is let me know. Who encouraged you outside the home?

Pamela Talley: Well, teachers, definitely, and I would say an 8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, James Murrell, Mr. Murrell was the one who exposed me to the black books and lecture circuit, Angela Davis, you know, the Panthers that whole bit. We were 8<sup>th</sup> grade and he was talking some of this and teaching some of that and it just absolutely was so inspiring to me, to be able to know that there were black people who were changing what was happening in their lives.

Malaika Horne: So, were they your early influences, I guess, Mr. Murrell and your mother?

Pamela Talley: Yes, right.

Malaika Horne: In college, who influenced you? Did you have any leadership positions in college?

Pamela Talley: I can't really say that I did. Nursing was such an intensive discipline and having the daughter was so intense for me, those very early college years but they did have the black student union and I was connected with that. I, through the black student union, became acquainted with the Black Nurses Association and so met a number of black nurses that were just, again, wonderful and role models for me in terms of the profession, and again, just people in community. I have just had this sense of community that I can't so much attribute to me but that the community...you know, there's your family but there's your community, the village, should be taking care of you and I just had that sense and so also when I was in school, I remember times when things were tough and I was struggling or whatever, there was always somebody who knew me, who was hanging there. For people in the community, it's like, "Hey, you got to get

through. You got to do this for us. You got to make this happen. You got to endure this struggle” and it was a struggle, even to the point that sometimes people would say, “I don’t have much. I know you need gas” because we had a clinical practice and somebody might give me \$2 or somebody else, I’d just run into them...or \$5 and I would even say Kenny Jones, of whom I’ve known forever and a day and I was in school and I would come...by then, my last few years, I lived in the dorm and I would go to my room and there would be an envelope with a little money, about \$20 under my door.

Malaika Horne: [Inaudible 16:37]...

Pamela Talley: Right.

Malaika Horne: And then he was part of the civil rights condition or something...

Pamela Talley: Yes, exactly, and the (Coalists?) Black Trade Unionists and all that was just encouragement to hang in there.

Malaika Horne: Well, you probably answered this question, who influenced you, maybe not during your career, and I do want to get to Lewis Place because there’s such a community, probably is the reason why you’ve been so much an active part of that but it sounds like Kenneth Jones, anybody else?

Pamela Talley: Well, I mean, I had many influences also at that time. That was when I was still in school. That was a time when they were closing Homer Phillips and so, again, I would leave school and practicum and go on the...

Malaika Horne: Let me say, Homer G. Phillips was the black hospital that they closed in the Ville.

Pamela Talley: Right, in The Ville neighborhood, right.

Malaika Horne: In the mid ‘80s.

Pamela Talley: Right. What was it about, ‘79 or ‘80, somewhere like that.

Malaika Horne: It was the early ‘80s because I remember, in ‘84 I was writing about it.

Pamela Talley: Okay, all right. Well, they were closing it, so yes. But again, people like Senator Gwen Giles, just seeing some of these dynamic women and

people...Pearly Evans, you know, who's still...when things get really crazy, I can perhaps call.

Malaika Horne: And Pearly Evans worked for Congressman Clay.

Pamela Talley: Right.

Malaika Horne: Senior Congressman Clay.

Pamela Talley: The senior Congressman Clay, seeing some of them at Homer Phillips as a part of fighting to keep that hospital open. But, again, also I have this sense of those every day heroes and she-roes that get up and go to work every day. I've not been able to do it like that but I do just kind of revere people who...I'm amazed at people who can do that, day in, day out.

Malaika Horne: You do it, too.

Pamela Talley: Well, I do but I'm all over the place. My brain is, I tell people, eclectic.

Malaika Horne: Let me go back. This is a question we ask every interviewee, and the best way, I think, to understand it is looking at your grandmother because the question is: 50 years earlier, what do you think you'd be doing and one lady say, "I'm going to have to think about my grandmother," then she started talking about her grandmother. So however you want to talk about it, 50 years earlier, what do you think you would have been doing?

Pamela Talley: Well, I don't know, but I certainly think about my grandmother, my dad's mother. I loved her dearly. I didn't know my mom's mother because she died when my mom was very, very young but my mother was raised by relatives who were, again, just kind of, I want to say powerful women. One of the women that I can remember, we always called her Cousin Norma but it was Norma Ross. She was an LVN. She went to school in Chicago.

Malaika Horne: Is that a licensed...

Pamela Talley: A licensed vocational nurse, right and up until her cousin who died, maybe...she was in her 90's, she died maybe about five years ago and she always said that I was so much like Norma. She just could not believe, one, being a nurse and being this independent nurse, just kind of like all over the place. She was one of those people that if anybody in the family was sick or needed something, she would just...she had her little money

and she would just pack up and go and help take care of folks was just strongly independent, was from Holly Springs, Mississippi. We visited them for years during the summer and I absolutely remember her with her shotgun and I think about me sometimes because, again, at that time, it was a fight over land. I mean, I'm hearing some of this about the highway and land and "they're not taking our land" and "if we sell it, we sell," so as a result, we still do have some of this land in Holly Springs, Mississippi. So there was another sister who was an educator in Lexington, Mississippi. She got to be the superintendent of schools in Lexington, Mississippi and I was a child and knowing these women...

Malaika Horne: Quite inspiring.

Pamela Talley: Yeah, you know, hadn't really thought about how they impacted and influenced. So Norma was one of the first people that I remember. She wouldn't eat pork. She boiled her water. She was this person who definitely watched what she ate and that certainly I am very much the same way. But, yes.

Malaika Horne: And this is interesting because you talked about this fight for land and this is a good segue into Lewis Place because you are, I think, known more for Louis Place than maybe for nursing. So how did you get involved in that? Tell us about Lewis Place.

Pamela Talley: Well, Lewis Place is one of the 79 neighborhoods in the city and it's located in the north central quarter of the city. It was known for the restricted covenant in the deeds saying that they would not sell to Negroes and there was a fierce fight for blacks to get into that community as they moved westward, legal battles and...

Malaika Horne: Exactly where is Lewis Place?

Pamela Talley: Oh, I'm sorry, I said north central quarter. Okay, the boundaries are Delmar on the south, Martin Luther King on the north, Newstead on the east and Walton on the west. And blacks actually started moving into that community in the '40s and, as I said, there was a fierce fight, every block, the Homeowner's Association fought to keep blacks out and blacks fought to move into the community and it was primarily middle class black people at that time who did come in. So, I had a relative who bought a house in the '50s and she was a cosmetologist and a lot of cosmetologists, they had cash money.

Malaika Horne: Did well.

Pamela Talley: Right, did well, had a beauty shop in the basement and her husband worked for one of the packing houses. So they were able to get a house there. Well, when they passed away, the house was available and so I did take the house. It wasn't necessarily what I wanted. It was almost like destiny. I don't want to say that but it happened and I didn't necessarily like the house. I'm being very honest, but also, I just understood the importance and significance of the community. This was a community where, early on, blacks came in, it was a private community or private street and that there was a sense of ownership in that and somehow or another, we needed to be stewards of that land.

Malaika Horne: And it's known for its architectural uniqueness. Some of them are grand mansions; some of them are maybe smaller cottages or something...

Pamela Talley: Right, bungalows, yes.

Malaika Horne: Bungalows, so it's a very unique community, very unique area.

Pamela Talley: Yes, it is, and it is, it's known for that unique architecture. It was laid out in the 1890's, from 1890 to about 1920, houses were built there and the neighborhood at one time was just beautiful and we still have glimpses of that and, again, for me, the community building piece is to continue to try to educate our community and to engage them in being stewards and saving this historic community.

Malaika Horne: And it's on the National Register.

Pamela Talley: It's on the National Registry of Historic Places that happened in about, I want to say somewhere between '75 and '79. Hazel White, Miss White, one of the presidents or commissioners for the Lewis Place neighborhood along with Congressman Clay, did get it placed on the National Registry of Historic Places. So, yes, it should be maintained.

Malaika Horne: So that's the purpose of Lewis place, is really to preserve it and have people engaged and value it and good stewards. How did you become a leader of Lewis Place?

Pamela Talley: Well, probably in about 1996, with some changes that had happened politically with the dissolution of Union Sara Development Corporation which had played a key role in maintaining Lewis Place, Fountain Park,

the Sherman Academy neighborhood, the Vandeventer neighborhood, much of that property north of Delmar, that historic property. The leadership of that corporation came under attack and there ended up being this dissolution. Well, there was literally not an organization there to maintain or oversee the development or the continued maintenance of these communities. And so we began to see just the depletion and the collapse of this community. There were probably more demolition permits than building permits at that time and so a group of neighbors, we issued a call and had about 30 neighbors to show up to determine what we could do to save our community. So along with Alvin Willis and Maddy Devine, we became the leadership for the Lewis Place historic preservation which took into consideration the entire Lewis Place neighborhood. That's how, is just looking at what we could do to save our neighborhood.

Malaika Horne: And I read something recently where you said that it was something to the effect of a "disinvestment" of the north side.

Pamela Talley: Well, it has been. One of the things is, we began to look at what was going on. It was the disinvestment plan that was put together as a part of Team Four in 1974, '75, to disinvest in North St. Louis, period, from Delmar to Natural Bridge, from, I think it was Skinker to downtown and it definitely involved all those communities where blacks were living primarily. So over the last 50 years, the city has just systematically engaged in disinvestment in North City. So when block grants...and I can't remember exactly when Congress implemented the federal block grants, but money from the community block grants was supposed to go to help remove (bly?), to employ low or moderate income people and all these other things that Congress set out that federal money should do. The city did the opposite. They would get the money off the misery and suffering north of Delmar and when the money came in, they would divert the money to downtown or central quarter and it continues to happen today.

Malaika Horne: And it shows.

Pamela Talley: Yes, it shows. They would do these little targeted developments in North City based upon whoever the mayor was at that time, whoever their allies were to prop them up for re-election but other than that, the plan to develop comprehensively in North St. Louis just has not happened. It was a plan to deplete North St. Louis.

Malaika Horne: And I know you have been, like I said, a leader of this movement. What do you think your leadership style is? How do you influence or lead the group?

Pamela Talley: Well, I'd like to believe that I am a builder and I'm always saying to people in our community, we should be building our community. There are a lot of challenges in our community and so often the exploitation and the neglect, it creates real challenges, what you're able to do so I really try to inspire, to build, to partner, to value people and their opinions and their gifts. I try to engage people at where I see them or where they would like to be and I think it just makes a difference. People need an opportunity. They don't always know that they have something to give and everybody has something to give and I would like to believe that I've been gifted in some ways to see gifts that people might be able to bring to the pie.

Malaika Horne: Great description. Have you ever thought of your style before, that you have a special style, and you do because I've observed it so you articulated that quite well.

Pamela Talley: Well, I just say I'm eclectic so I don't know, a variety of things, but I think I am a builder.

Malaika Horne: Is there a difference, do you think, between the way men lead, generally, and the way women lead generally?

Pamela Talley: I think so. Men lead from top down. So I've worked with men in community and it's always a challenge, not always but most of the time.

Malaika Horne: What's the challenge because that's one of the other questions?

Pamela Talley: Well, the challenge is that, because they lead from the top down, so they like to tell and I lead...it's more a collective. I'm asking people, "What's your opinion? What do you think?" challenging people to think about, to analyze what we're doing, why we're doing it. I'm always challenging people, which is very, very different, and I can think about a couple of men that I am probably working with now who really have problems with my leadership style, probably because I'm opinionated, because I haven't pedestal-placed them and just there to be their servant in community. That's such a challenge for me now in community and also, as we build community, I have to take into account...because we also have to

partner, not only with the people who are there but the churches who are there and I recently...and I was in one way very inspired by a young minister in the community, but on the other hand, it's a denomination where women don't play a leadership role in their church. If the church is going to partner with the community, here in this community, it's the women who are giving...

Malaika Horne: And the congregation's probably a majority of women.

Pamela Talley: Yes, but they are the cookies and tea.

Malaika Horne: They are traditional.

Pamela Talley: Very, very traditional.

Malaika Horne: So how do you address that?

Pamela Talley: Well, the way I address that is I try to get them to do those things that they would do so I literally...you know, this is a new pastor in the community; this is the church; it's in a partnership. We have all these kids who need tutoring and help reading, with math and reading and so I have actually gone to this church and said, "Well, this is what the community needs and this is what the community needs" and let them just do it. It's like, own it.

Malaika Horne: And have they started doing it?

Pamela Talley: Well, they are talking about it. They've put out the information through the congregation to see how many tutors they can get and they're going to open their church on Saturday which is great because right now, I'm working with neighbors where we tutor three days a week and we still have all these kids who, especially since the time for school has changed, we have kids who still need help and so Saturday morning would be perfect. So if the church will own it, that's good. Anybody who will own whatever they do...it's like, own it, and if you need me, let me know.

Malaika Horne: Any big failures?

Pamela Talley: Well, yeah, I would have to say. Sometimes these relationships are a failure and I truly say that because I keep hearing sometimes from neighbors who say that I should be working with..."Oh, you should work with so-and-so and so-and-so. You should be working with..."...and I'm

like, "We're not working together? I think we are. I think we're working together," I do.

Malaika Horne: What do you mean by that? Your neighbors keep telling you... you should be working with someone else?

Pamela Talley: Yes, and I should be working with this person and we should be working closer and we should be doing this and if we just work together, we could be doing all these wonderful things, and I'm like, "I thought we were working together." Part of it is...the issue is just a difference in leadership style, not only a difference in leadership style, but what we value. I'm an activist leader. I don't think I need to...for the powers that be...I speak truth to power. I have voice for that, you know. That's one of the things that came out of my childhood, is, you may not like it but if I don't like it, you'll know it. You will never say that I was happy about it if I wasn't.

Malaika Horne: So do you think the biggest failure is these relationships? Is that what you're saying?

Pamela Talley: Relationships are always a challenge, yeah. They are such a challenge in the fact that...because I do believe that I try to value everybody but we don't always see eye-to-eye. It doesn't work and I am only willing...I only have so much energy and time. It's finite and I'm not going to invest and waste a whole lot of time in some stuff. I just won't do it.

Malaika Horne: So, the next question is, what have you learned from these experiences? Is that what you've learned, you're going to only spend so much time or make so much investment?

Pamela Talley: Yes, that is a valuable lesson. That is also a lesson I've learned from history, from one of my favorite writers, W.E.B. Dubois and also, the Gospel of Matthew talks about not spending a whole lot of time with people who have vile things to say. You just don't spend the time.

Malaika Horne: Any big opportunities on the horizon?

Pamela Talley: Everything's an opportunity.

Malaika Horne: Any big ones?

Pamela Talley: Oh, yeah, there's a couple of big opportunities. The City of St. Louis spent...we were hit by a tornado in 2010 and so there was a million

dollars that, between the city and the state, they managed to come up with and I would say that was also because of the wonderful people behind this thing who responded and put pressure on the city and who absolutely got tired of seeing me on TV and in the newspaper. But the city spent about a half a million dollars to help home owners. There is a half a million dollars left that the city wanted to cut a deal with the three blocks of Lewis Place, not to finish helping home owners and make it easier for some of the other home owners throughout the block, but to repair our streets, which are desperately broken, raggedy streets because we are a private block.

Malaika Horne: So when you're a private block, the city does not take care of it?

Pamela Talley: Oh, the city doesn't take care of that. We have to do those things ourselves, so we fill our own pot holes. There have been times when we have gone out and gotten the asphalt ourselves, several of the leaders, a lot of self-help and self-determination in being a private street. But the city put forth a proposal that they wanted us to sign over our property from the grass level to mid-way, the park, so what happens is that each home owner owns halfway through the Parkway and that would have made the city the largest land owner in the Lewis Place neighborhood, to me, so I was invited to a meeting with a few of my neighbors and there had already been some discussion but I do believe that they thought they had to try to get me on board before they brought it to the neighbors, and, of course I wouldn't make a decision there and said I had to discuss it with the board of directors, whether we would accept that it was a good idea that we should deed our property to the city and what would that mean for us. The board of directors of the Lewis Place Historic Preservation overwhelmingly said no, which was great, yes, and I think as an individual, I would not have anyway. Again, we sit in a community that's north of Delmar. The streets around us are not well maintained. Taylor is raggedy and holey and patched and it's a major thoroughfare...Walton. I mean, the city just north of Delmar, there's very little investment. So I could not see where it would benefit us, 1) unless we have something absolutely in writing, we could not believe them.

Malaika Horne: And there's the national attention on this Delmar divide and you're right in the midst of it.

Pamela Talley: We're part of the Delmar divide and I tell people all the time, it's not a metaphor. I think people read about this and think it's a metaphor. You know, step north of Delmar and Taylor and look at the lots and the lack of trees, no tree line, the debris. For almost three years, we had a neighbor and kids who got up every Saturday morning and picked up the trash from Page and Taylor all the way down to Taylor and Delmar, at the bus stop. We asked for trash cans. We petitioned for trash cans at the bus stop and then the kids would go around to Walton and back up to Page. So they cleaned up the perimeter of the neighborhood and there were three neighbors who...the one neighbor who took the kids along with the neighbor on Enright and we provided a stipend for these young people who were 11 to 15, to get out and just pick up the trash, to keep the neighborhood from looking so bad. I mean, there's some things that we can just...and that is the other thing about what I do with my neighbors in this challenge. I mean, there's some things that we can do for ourselves. I mean, we shouldn't put the trash down at the beginning, and sometimes it's not always us; it's people driving through, whatever, but if the trash is there, let's pick it up. The lots, the community garden that is just beautiful in the neighborhood and we need others. Those are things that we can do. It'll take a little money, yes, and a lot of time and energy but we just have to do those things.

Malaika Horne: And I must say that this Delmar divide has gotten even national attention.

Pamela Talley: Yes.

Malaika Horne: And so hopefully your work and the work of others will turn this around.

Pamela Talley: Well, again, I think, with what I know that's going on now, the city hasn't changed its policies. We have an initiative, a presidential initiative, "Strong City, Strong Communities" that the City of St. Louis is utilizing to build and engage the Paul McKee footprint like that whole piece is off and we've had elected officials who have sold that Pruitt-Igoe area and that Paul McKee footprint like that is North St. Louis. And "Strong City, Strong Communities" could have been the technical assistance to address the systematic racism and disinvestment in North St. Louis that was done by Team Four. That's what should have happened. That's what it was intended to do. Again, instead, it has come and it is under the auspices of the mayor and we're looking at the same old soup.

Malaika Horne: Let me just be clear about the big opportunity. Was the big opportunity that you turned down the \$500,000?

Pamela Talley: I didn't finish it. The big opportunity is that we were supposed to get the street done and we don't have to give up our street. We're supposed to get the street paved and we don't have to give up our property. That's a big opportunity. The other big opportunity is that there's a house on the block that we have been...one house for five years, we've been fighting to get. It was a foreclosure, so unbelievable. When I say that the infrastructure to do development in North City was literally eroded, so we have to put all of these things back in place. So when Union Sara was dissolved, it was set up to do development and rehab. Well, when it dissolved...

Malaika Horne: ...all that went away.

Pamela Talley: All that went away so just putting those pieces in place and getting the recognition of the city to just be able to do one house has been, like, five years. It's an unbelievable struggle. It has been deliberate. It has been...because, again, it will give us the opportunity to start turning things around. We will be seen as a developer. So we actually are partnering with a small developer and the Preservation will be doing development in the Lewis Place Fountain Park.

Malaika Horne: So you got that house?

Pamela Talley: We have the house and we should be starting any day. We got our financing and, yes, we should start any day to renovate and it is our goal to do a sustainability plan for the neighborhood. I mean, we have some really good things going on, have a guy who's a retired military who did disaster work in service and he's now helping to pull together a disaster plan for the Lewis Place Fountain Park area, because that neighborhood's been hit by tornados three times, over the years. So we didn't know that but, yeah, so we need to...but it also helps to build community. Any of those things that you can...again, people have these gifts and these resources. You bring them in and you let them put it to work to help the community because we need everything.

Malaika Horne: Right. Are there other houses that you have your eyes on?

- Pamela Talley: Yes, we do. We have a couple other houses on Lewis Place, some houses on MacMillan, house on Enright. I'm always meeting with developers who may have the capacity to do some things that can partner with to maybe save our neighborhood.
- Malaika Horne: It's so exciting.
- Pamela Talley: Yeah, it is very, very exciting.
- Malaika Horne: Okay, good because I can ask you some questions that I was going to skip over but these are some of my favorite questions. One is...and it doesn't have to be a young person. It could be any age: What do you see in people when you see leadership potential? What do you see in these other people that you encounter?
- Pamela Talley: I think it's courage. I have a passion for young people. I think it's because they are courageous. They don't have all these artificial fears and they're not caught up in this...
- Malaika Horne: ...[Inaudible 51:02].
- Pamela Talley: Yes, so they can do that. But they just need discipline and direction and so that's what I see. It's that not having fear. It's courage.
- Malaika Horne: Have you met someone like that?
- Pamela Talley: Certainly, yes.
- Malaika Horne: Can you describe that person?
- Pamela Talley: Well, I'm looking right now at State Senator Maria Chappelle Nadal. She has courage and is a leader and I hope it's going to be a good leader on a national level. She's somebody that makes me hopeful because the corruption is just so...sometimes it can be overwhelming, in city and state politics.
- Malaika Horne: That's for sure. What is some good advice or the best advice you can give to others who are trying to make a difference?
- Pamela Talley: Well, I think you have to..."To thine own self be true" and I think that's where it starts. You have to find your voice.
- Malaika Horne: How do you do that? How do you find your voice?

- Pamela Talley: I don't know. I have an aunt who would say you have to stand flat-footed and cuss. She was a Southerner. You have to stand flat-footed and cuss and I tell people that in therapy sometimes. I do therapy with people and I say you have to...
- Malaika Horne: Like a psychiatric nurse.
- Pamela Talley: Right, you have to find your voice. You have to ask, what is it you need; what is it you want. You just have to do that.
- Malaika Horne: So, I guess, if you push yourself and you challenge something and you get maybe emotional, "being flat-footed and cuss," you will begin to realize this is what I care about.
- Pamela Talley: This is passion. This is what you have some passion for.
- Malaika Horne: They talk a lot about passion.
- Pamela Talley: You have to have a sense of purpose and you have to have something you're passionate about.
- Malaika Horne: A sense of purpose is also important.
- Pamela Talley: Yes.
- Malaika Horne: I notice some people don't seem to have it, to me.
- Pamela Talley: Oh, that's right. A lot of people don't have it; they don't have it.
- Malaika Horne: Okay. And you may have mentioned some of this before but, who was your mentor, your heroine or your hero? Who do you look toward?
- Pamela Talley: I have a lot of people I look toward. Like I said, sometimes it's everyday people who get up and go to work and can get some credit so they're important but some of my...shero in history is Sojourner Truth , I just love dearly and Mary...
- Malaika Horne: Let's talk about Sojourner Truth, just a few things, some characteristics.
- Pamela Talley: Oh, she had courage; she challenged the status quo; she had some clarity and a vision that was just beyond her years...Mary McCloud Bethune.
- Malaika Horne: She started the college?

- Pamela Talley: Yes, the Cook College where the LVN school where I think it was where my cousin actually went to nursing school.
- Malaika Horne: In Florida?
- Pamela Talley: She did start in Florida but I thought she did one also in Chicago.
- Malaika Horne: And as advisor to the Roosevelt Administration.
- Pamela Talley: Exactly. In her last will and testament is just something near and dear to me. I sometimes say that because she said, "I don't want people to say that 'I tried'; I want people to say that 'I did'" which is also with me. I don't ask permission. I might ask forgiveness. If I'm inspired enough to do it, I will. And more recently, I've been listening to and reading James H. Cone, the father of Liberation and Black Theology.
- Malaika Horne: How do you spell that last name?
- Pamela Talley: C-o-n-e, Cone.
- Malaika Horne: James H. Cone.
- Pamela Talley: Right, and God of the oppressed of which, if you think about the context of that, the God of the oppressed has to be different from the God of the oppressor. It's like, who are you praying to, for people who are praying, who you're praying to is very important.
- Malaika Horne: So what does that essentially mean, black liberation theory, essentially what does that mean?
- Pamela Talley: Well, it's for Christians who have embraced God and the Gospel and say they're believers. What do you believe in? They're still enslaving our people through this guilt and shame or exploitation. James Cone has written many books. One of the things he said is that the black church is dead because they've lost their mission. There are some people who are very angry with them. He says that the Gospel is the Gospel of an activist Jesus Christ. He was a revolutionary and that these pastors who are in these churches, whatever they're doing, they just sold the community out and if they're going to preach the Gospel, the good news is that the poor can be transformed. You don't have to be poor but we've got to do some things about this. I mean, he's wonderfully inspiring to me and I listen to him often as well Cornell West.

Malaika Horne: I'll look him up.

Pamela Talley: Yes, look him up. He's great.

Malaika Horne: Cornell West.

Pamela Talley: Yeah, so...

Malaika Horne: So, I was going to ask you what you read but apparently you're reading Cone and West, I would assume.

Pamela Talley: Yes, yes.

Malaika Horne: Anybody else you're reading?

Pamela Talley: That's kind of it.

Malaika Horne: Any hobbies. I can imagine...

Pamela Talley: Avid gardener, I'm an avid gardener and reading but I do spend a lot of time with kids, tutoring and helping and molding, shaping, still taking care of children because they are the stewards and we have a real opportunity to teach them some things that can just make a difference in their lives and in the next generation's lives. They frequently work with us in the garden and recently I had a couple of kids who were fussing because, in summer program, they work in the garden a couple of days a week and it's really hot and all this other stuff and one of the 11-year-olds was saying, "Well, I'm not working in the garden anymore. It's too hot. I'll be sweating" and somebody said, "Yes, sweating and sweating," and anyway, so I said that, "You're working in the garden because you're learning skills and you might have to feed your family one day. You have studied global warming" and so they're getting science and technology and agriculture. It's my way of being able to give back in terms of science and some of those things that I love passionately.

Malaika Horne: So this a teachable moment, huh?

Pamela Talley: It is always a teachable moment with kids for me. So, yes.

Malaika Horne: Wow, very interesting. So, let me ask you this: You have received awards and recognitions and I know that you received the Women of Achievement Award because I was there at the program, which is

probably one of the most prestigious in the region. So, that, or anything else, could you talk about your recognitions and your awards?

Pamela Talley: Yes. Yes, I did, and I'm very grateful for that and I think it had a lot of meaning because my neighbors nominated me for that Women of Achievement Award but I've also received an award from the Robert Woods Johnson Foundation as a community health leader and that's after they spent a couple of days here with me on the ground, in the trenches, doing work with grandparents raising grandchildren as well as the work I was doing around imminent domain, fighting imminent domain. Many awards and recognition, I'm so humbled by it because it's not why I do what I do, and then also one from the Prince Hall Masons as a humanitarian after the work with the tornado in our neighborhood because they were one of the first groups that stepped up and stepped in to help us and that just meant so much because we later learned that the black masons, the Prince Hall Masons have been the people who helped to build those houses in the 1890's and 1900's. That was their masonry work. So, yeah, I've had many awards and recognitions for which I'm very grateful.

Malaika Horne: And the category under Women of Achievement, because I know each one has a category. What was your category?

Pamela Talley: I think it was community advocacy.

Malaika Horne: Community advocacy, that's a very appropriate title. So, if there's nothing else, then that concludes the interview. Thank you so much.

Pamela Talley: Thank you.