

## We Exist Series 5

### Mrs. June McKenzie on Education and Employment



#### Quote 1

“You have to train a child when they're small, values and things. And when they go to school, you have to be a part of whatever they do and be a part of the PTA and things like that because if you don't take an interest in what your kids are doing, then the people at school won't take an interest in them, either. I mean, if they know you're there for your children, then they get better care, you know. And I work a lot with the NAACP and I try to tell parents that if your child is in school, even if you can't speak the language, go and let them know that you're interested in your child's future, you know. Like when my daughter was in the seventh grade and she was getting ready to figure out what she was gonna be and she applied. She was gonna go to college,

and the teacher told her, 'You can take that off of there, because you're not college material.' And she came home and told me and I said, 'If she's willing enough to work hard to go to college, you have no right to tell her that she can't.' But otherwise if I hadn't been interested in what she was doing, then I would never know that that happened. And it happens today all the time, you know. They try to put kids of color in one group and so parents have to be vigilant. I mean, they say even though the civil rights movement cleared up a lot of that stuff, you still have to be vigilant.”

#### Quote 2

“Well, just like I said, I always taught the children to do the best they could and be the best that they could. And, you know, sometimes they'd say, 'Well, I don't want to do this.' And it was good when the younger children were young because my daughter taught at Jack when they were there, and my son worked for the City of Portland at the police athletic league and he worked here in City Hall. And I guess they knew a lot of people, so we knew where they were all the time. You know. After school they'd go and play sports at the police station or they'd be in sports at school. And they had a system. You had to be home every night for dinner. You know. And there wasn't any screaming and yelling; if you had a problem, we had family council meetings. And it was sort of diplomatic. You know. I worked two jobs a lot of times when they were growing up. It was hard, but we told them that education was important, and so, therefore, five out of the eight graduated from college. And three have their master's-no, four have their masters. And one is working for the Ph.D. And everywhere I go I hear nice things about them, because they'll say, 'Your kids are so nice to everyone.' And it makes me proud. They've never given me any trouble; they've never been in jail. So they're nice productive kids. I have to brag...”

**June McKenzie**, a fifth-generation Mainer, was born in Portland, Maine, in 1929, one of twelve children. Her mother, Florence Eastman Williams, was a Portland native; her father, a truck driver, was a graduate of Tuskegee Institute. She graduated from Portland High School in 1947; she attended Northeastern Business College for one year, and took several classes at the American Institute of Banking while employed at People's Heritage Bank, where she worked for twenty-two years. She married and had eight children, and at the time of this interview had two grandchildren. She is a longtime member of the NAACP in Portland, and an active member of Green Memorial AME Zion Church. She has been active in the civil rights movement in Maine, including organizing and participating in protests and marches.

**You can Listen to Mrs. McKenzie's full interview and read a transcript at**

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