Oral History Interview with Ed King
By Gloria Beckett

GB: Today is Friday, December 27, 2013. This is Gloria Beckett with the Galloway Oral History Project, funded by the Mississippi Humanities Council. I am interviewing the Reverend Ed King about his time at Galloway United Methodist Church in Jackson, MS. We are at his office at the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson. Thank you for allowing me to interview you, Reverend King. Would you please state and spell your name.

EK: Edwin King E-D-W-I-N. K-I-N-G.

GB: Where and when were you born?

EK: I was born in Vicksburg, Mississippi in 1936.

GB: What are the names of your parents?

EK: I’m a junior. My father was Ralph Edwin King, Sr. My mother was Julia Wilmoth Tucker King.

GB: What is the name of your wife and children?

EK: My wife divorced me 25 years or so ago. Her name was Jeannette. Her maiden name was Sylvester. She grew up in Forest Hill in the Forest Hill Methodist Church.

GB: And we’ll start from the beginning.

ED: I’ve got two children. Two daughters who live on the West coast. The oldest is Lillian Marie, named for Ms. Lillian Smith, a very prominent southern Methodist agitator and advocate for peace and civil rights, with relatives in Galloway church. The younger daughter is Margaret. She has two daughters. The older girl has two sons. The older girl, Lillian, lives in the Seattle area.

GB: Please share with us your story before coming to Galloway?

EK: Well, we’ll go quickly on these. I think that’s what they would want. I started coming to events at Galloway by the time I was 15, 16 years old through statewide meetings and the Methodist Youth Fellowship. I was a member of Crawford Street Methodist Church in Vicksburg. C-r-a-w-f-o-r-d. It’s actually older than Galloway. At statewide youth meetings, usually held at Millsaps, we would come to events at Galloway, and knew of Galloway as the most important church, and the most important pulpit in the state. So I was always pleased to come here and impressed with things at Galloway. I entered Millsaps in the fall of 1954, and often attended youth meetings at Galloway as well as the Sunday mornings to hear Dr. Selah. I knew I was going into the Methodist ministry, so I, also, frequently went to Capital Street because I wanted to hear Roy Clark who was the pastor there.

GB: How did you come to be member of Galloway?

EK: Well, ministers are not exactly members. Ministers would be assigned. If they are not in the active ministry pastoring a church, they are retired, or if they’re teaching school or something like that, the
District Superintendents and the Bishops would assign them to a particular church. You should always be related to some church. I had been. Most of my ministry has been as a teacher. I was chaplain at Tougaloo College for several years, and then had been adjunct faculty at Millsaps for 30 years or so. I’ve been here at the Medical Center teaching medical ethics, death and dying, communications with patients and courses like that, sociology of healthcare (originally). This is getting into the technology of ministers. I’ve been related to several local churches, and that’s usually through the ministers, someone you know. Most people who are in teaching don’t get particular assignments, duties, but are expected to help with communion and things like that. For a number of years I was with Anderson Methodist Church, but I lived closer to Galloway, and I began attending services at Galloway. I had no Sunday responsibilities as a minister in special appointment. In the late 1980s, I began attending services at Galloway, and then was designated by the District Superintendent as the church where I would be making reports, helping when there was anything special needed, be called the charge conference that I am affiliated with and so has been for 20, 25 years. (ck this sentence)

GB: What are some of your fondest memories at Galloway beginning at the time that you attended?

EK: Well, the Sunday School Christian Fellowship Class, and the choir, and I knew the preaching would be good at Galloway.

GB: You mentioned the choir, what in particular?

EK: Well, I had been coming to special events by the choir since I was a Millsaps student. I knew that on any Sunday the music would be good. And the organ would be good. Then the choir usually had some kind of special event, special concert during the year.

GB: What was involved in the Christian Fellowship Class that you refer to?

EK: I knew people in the class. I had known of the class. I knew several Millsaps professors who were in that class. I knew and had been close friends with members of that class since the early ‘60s.

GB: Who were some of the members that you remember?

EK: Well, Bob and Carol Bergmark—they are now deceased. Lee Reiff, now retired. Lives out of state. A network that would have had Millsaps as the kind of interconnecting link.

GB: What are some of your not-so-good memories during that particular time, if any?

EK: Well, depending on which particular times.

GB: Let’s see.

ED: If we’re talking about the last 25 years?

GB: What are - - yes, we can relate to the last 25 years.

EK: Yes, I have other highpoints at Galloway that would go back to college and seminary years. The Methodist Annual Conference usually met at Galloway church, so I would have been attending those meetings until 1963. In 1959, I was ordained deacon after my first year in seminary at Boston Seminary School of Theology. That Ordination occurred at Galloway church.

GB: I’m sorry, what was the name of the Seminary again?
EK: Boston University. And, in 1961 I was ordained Deacon - - that was ’59. In ’61, I was ordained Elder.

GB: I’m sorry sir, can you repeat those dates? 1969 you were ordained - -

ED: Well, in 1959 I was ordained deacon at the Communion rail there at Galloway church.

GB: And in 1961?

EK: I was ordained Elder, which was the term used at that time for seminary students who had completed three years of work.

GB: And that was also - - done at Galloway?

EK: Yes. And when the Annual Conference was meeting at Galloway in 1963, I was thrown out.

GB: Can you elaborate on that for us?

EK: Well, technically, was not admitted into the Methodist Conference, the Mississippi Conference, the Southeastern jurisdiction which is what I had grown up in. At that time that was the all-white Conference and the ministerial delegates had to vote on the character education, anything of ministers who are admitted into full connection. I had been on trial. Very complicated but these are steps to becoming a minister. And, was to be voted on that year at the last, well, at the session of the Conference. The session was one of immense turmoil. A number of young men had been driven out of the state and weren’t even there. Others were attending their last meeting of clergy before they had to leave the state and into the midst of that, here I was to be voted on.

GB: Why did these men have to leave the state?

EK: These men had taken a public stand for desegregation after the Meredith crisis.

GB: And you were thrown out?

EK: Those men were already in the church. I was still in seminary, had stayed in seminary for graduate school so had not been admitted into the Conference. Once I came back to Mississippi as Chaplain of Tougaloo College, which was approved by the Bishop and the District Superintendent as a special appointment, then I needed to be in full connection and that vote was taken at the last session, last day of Conference.

Medgar Evers got me released from prison in time to be voted on. Not exactly the ideal, although there are Christians who have been to prison in the scriptures. I was voted down by a margin of 4, 3 or 4 votes, even coming out of prison, and there were civil rights demonstrations by my students at Tougaloo College - - going on each day.

GB: Where were you in prison?

EK: O, just Jackson city jail, Hinds County, probably still in city jail. Yes, I would have been in city jail at that time.

GB: And this had a bearing on the decision?

EK: Well, I think it may have had some bearing, but some people voted for me but these were people who had, some of them, had known me for ten or twelve years. Others were terribly frightened of what
was happening, and a few of those votes for me were probably by some of the men headed to Indiana or California or other places. Other men that I knew from Millsaps had already left the state. So, that was a remarkable vote. In theory that made me no longer a minister. But I was taken into the Black Methodist Church the next day.

GB: Any one in particular?

EK: No, no, by the Black Conference. At that time the Black churches were in the Central jurisdiction. All of this will probably get too complicated. That’s a different history, but it’s there with positive in other things. When the Conferences merged, I was taken back in, and the two Mississippi Conferences merged. Earlier years, the North Mississippi or the Upper Mississippi and the Central jurisdiction Conference, had merged. Instead of having four separate conferences, we were down to two, and finally we’re down to just one Conference in the state.

GB: I heard you use the word “frightened” a couple of times: men were frightened, these were frightened men. Can you elaborate more on what you are referring to?

EK: Men who may have preached something about the racial issue that people didn’t like. Some of the men who were driven out of the state had signed a statement - 28 of them. They were honored at the Annual Conference this year on the 50th Anniversary. They took a stand -- public stand --that Christians would support integration. Some of them lost their pulpits the next day. Others had crosses burned at their home, telephone calls threatening their wife, children. If the wives taught at the public schools, they would be threatened there. This was the kind of pattern that had been established. So people were very afraid. At the Annual Conference people were afraid to take a stand, if they hadn’t quite made up their mind; they didn’t want to be labeled. Later the next year or so they got labels.

GB: How were they labeled? What were they labeled?

EK: They would’ve been labeled as favoring integration. And would have consciously taken a step. When it came to a vote on something, they hadn’t made up their minds about. It was very hard.

GB: Were you ever frightened, Rev. King?

EK: I don’t think this goes into the Galloway history that you need.

GB: OK. (mark that out)

EK: Of course I was frightened. Many times. Still am at times. I think about the state of the world and the country. Not frightened by anything in the church here in Mississippi. But anybody who’s not worried about the world - - I think what we need here maybe some reference back there, but I would assume what they’re looking for is people who’ve been at Galloway if they are my age, 77, their whole life. But I started attending service and things at Galloway probably around 1988 - 89 somewhere along in there. My major activity was through the Christian Fellowship Class.

GB: Is that class still meeting today?

EK: Oh yes. It has people like most of Galloway. There are some people who’ve been there 40 - 50 years. Over the years - - as Methodist minister in special appointment to colleges or after I retired from the Conference, and I’m retired here at the Medical Center just teaching part-time. I would be asked along with T.W. Lewis or Don Fortenberry or Lee Reiff or any of the clergy be asked to assist with the
Communion Service. That’s the kind of courtesy that’s normally given, and I’ve always been appreciative in doing that. When we began on Wednesday a noon prayer and healing service, I would attend it because I support it, and I like to attend things that showed loyalty. Usually the Associate Pastor or the Youth Pastor would be in charge of that service. Over several years when one of them had a conflict, I would sometimes be asked to lead that service. In the late nineties somewhere along in there, I was asked just to be in charge of that service and when I couldn’t do it, I asked the Associate Pastor or the Youth Pastor. I was glad to do that. It’s the main leadership thing that I do in the church.

GB: Do you remember when you decided that you wanted to be in this profession? To be a Christian leader? Do you remember the time?

EK: In high school. But again, the Methodist Church throughout the nation had a very strong youth program, the Methodist Youth Fellowship and the Methodist Student Movement for college students. You would go to meetings beyond your local church and meet other people, You could meet other, at that time, men who were thinking of going into the ministry. The women were usually talking about becoming Christian education leaders, but you still knew of people around that were going into the ministry of some sort. It was a very gradual kind of thing.

GB: What was appealing about it? About going into the ministry?

EK: I think I always wanted to be of service of some kind. Helping others and I was very close to local ministers, particularly Tom Prewitt P-R-E-W-I-T-T in the church in Vicksburg. He was always guiding me along. College and then seminary. Dr. Selah, the pastor of Galloway, would have been one of the guides helping me.

GB: Can you think of any other instances, when you were perhaps a lad or very early in your teens that may have influenced your decision also?

EK: No, I mean I went to Sunday School. The ministers and the Sunday school teachers were always suggesting full-time Christian careers-- missionary, various things like this. It was something. I don’t even know of any friends who had some flash that this was what they were called to. You would just be thinking about, talking about it. At Millsaps those who were going into the ministry there---- there were 30, 40 young men. So it became more and more a routine kind of calling. I certainly do think it’s a calling.

GB: And it’s a calling that you’ve been doing for quite a while now and you continue to do!

EK: Well, you’re called for a life of service. You may not know where that service will be. To be in the church --- that’s always been the most important part of my identify of who I am as a Christian, serving as a minister---it’s in America or in the world and in modern times.

GB: It’s an interesting life.

EK: Well, my life stays interesting. It’s been unbelievably interesting, but I’ve always been hopeful. In discouraging moments, I’ve had somebody to give me a word of hope and I see my most important ministry as giving a word of hope and encouragement to others .

GB: Well said. You’ve done a lot in your life. If you were to - - How would you give encouragement to the younger people at Galloway? What would you want to say to them?
EK: Keep your eyes and your ears open so that you see things and hear things, but be aware that we are all a little deaf and a little blind to things that others may see. So share what you see and hear as the word of God with others, and get them to share with you. We are never told that things would be easy, but we are told that there would be joy in taking up the cross and enduring. I would tell young people that you will be surprised thirty years from now at what has happened in your life, but be open to the times that you are needed, and open to the times that you can serve, and open to the blessings of other people around you.

GB: Thank you, Rev. King. Is there anything you would like to add?

EK: I’m grateful to Galloway and to various pastors over the years. I’ve been asked a few times to give sermons there, and it’s always been an awesome occasion for me. I’m in awe of that pulpit, since I’ve known so many wonderful preachers who have been there. I do appreciate that opportunity and to be trusted with serving the Eucharist and the prayers at the Wednesday Healing Service.

GB: Thank you very much.

ED: Thank you.