



# Video Story Transcript

## Ripples from a Field in Mississippi to General Motors in New York

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**Link to YouTube Video:**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TloDlvR38Gc>

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Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

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Hi, my name is Diane Macklin. There are moments in history that are like a rock thrown into the lake of time. The ripples reach all the way to the shore even if you cannot see them.

It was May 1968. Barbara Jean stood at a Greyhound bus station staring across the street. The bus wasn't there yet but her siblings were, her two sisters and her youngest brother. They were holding hands, watching her, hoping that maybe she would walk to them. Maybe she would head back home to the shotgun shack. She wasn't going to. She looked down at her freshly polished shoes, saw the little bit of dust on them where she could wipe it off. She had her suitcase. She was determined. She was going to go. Nothing could keep her in Mississippi. Barbara Jean pulled out of her purse the clipping from the newspaper. "Hard working young women needed, live-in maid, New York City." She folded it up again and put it back in her purse. She was going to go. This was May.

A month earlier, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1968 a shot rang out in Memphis Tennessee. A hundred miles north of where she lived, and it came shatterin' all the way down to where she lived. And she knew the dream was gone. Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated. The dream that work would come to the South, that work would return to Mississippi. People that knew the life of sharecropping, people that knew how to work the land, would have work again. But without Dr. Martin Luther King, who was trying to help people to get work, she would never find work, and nor would her children, even though she had no children. She had to go. She had to go to New York. There was work in New York. The bus came. She looked down at the ground. She might stay, if she looked at them again. She got on that bus. She got on the far side away from where her siblings were standing

there. The bus pulled off, and she could not look at them. But they stood there until the bus was out of sight. She rode that bus all the way to New York City with that \$24 ticket that she gave to that bus driver. She got off and was met with people she'd never seen before.

Women with hair, women with no hair. Women with short hair, women with long hair. There were all sorts of people from all sorts of places from the world. It was a lot of movement, a lot of sound. And she made her way all the way to her employer who brought her to the house that she was going to work. Now as a live-in maid, she knew hard work and this was nothing compared to the work that she did on a farm. At four years old, she learned how to pick cotton. And then at 12 years old, she could pick 300 pounds of cotton. And by the time she was 15, she could pick 600 pounds of cotton, take care of her brothers and sisters, help them to pick because she was determined to make sure that their family picked more cotton than anybody else.

She knew hard work, but there was another work that she did that was harder than dusting and mopping floors. At night, she would sit in a backroom quiet, listening to her employers. They're from the North. And then she would go back to her own bedroom, sit on the bed, and start to train her tongue not to speak like she was from the South. She felt that people would not think that she was intelligent. They would think she was unintelligent if she sounds like she was a Southerner.

But one day she met this man. He was charming, he was a taxi cab driver. And in his charm, he convinced her to give her... give him, her phone number and she did. She didn't want to lie.

So, she gave him her phone number but she gave him all the wrong numbers in all the wrong places. But they were the right numbers but all the wrong places.

But he spent two months trying every single combination of those numbers until he reached her. And he courted her and she fell in love. And this man worked for General Motors, hmm, General Motors. There weren't many women that worked for General Motors. So, she asked him, well, should she apply and he didn't think it was a good idea. It was a man's place. It was a man's job. Required someone who was strong, who could work hard.

He didn't know her very well. Her father was a blacksmith. She would shoe horses with him. She would make fence posts and put up fences. They would go out and glean for metal. She knew metal and she knew hard work. So, she applied. They continued to court.

She got a job on the assembly line in 1974. And a lot of folks came up to her and told her, "You know, this isn't your kind of work, so you can stay on the assembly line but that's about it."

But she took classes and she did well. She excelled more than any other student. Some folks thought that they didn't like this so much. Some folks thought that they needed to turn her locker upside down to discourage her. Some folks thought they needed to put glue in her lock to discourage her. Some folks thought they needed to meld all of her tools together to discourage her.

But she knew something! A skilled trade was one of the highest paid positions at General Motors, at that plant in New... Tarrytown, New York. She was going to shoot for that. She took course after course, credit after credit, certification... certificate after certificate. And eventually she became the first woman and the second person of color to work at the skilled trades at Tarrytown General Motors plant. And, eventually, she did have two lovely children, and they had an opportunity to live in New York, with opportunities that she felt she did not have. And one of those children have told you the story of their mother, Barbara Jean Macklin.

