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Orange resident looks back on century of pain, progress

By John Zucal
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Everyone goes through experiences in their lives. For one resident of the Washington Manor seniors building, the well of experiences overflowed long ago.

Ruby Forney was born Sept. 23, 1911, as one of seven children to Gilbert and Minnie Wilson in Elizabethton, Tenn. Forney said she only had a third-grade education because she was needed at home to help take care of her younger siblings and father.

Forney married at 16, to her 17-year-old sweetheart, Addie Forney, and moved to Montclair with her only child, Purcell Barney, who currently lives in Michigan.

As she raised her son, Forney said, she worked several jobs. Locations included the Picatinny Arsenal, Overbrook Hospital and Easton Tool. She worked as a nurse's aide and cooked at nursing home. Forney said she was proud she never sought government assistance to help raise her son.

Orange always seemed to be a soft spot for Forney. During her 100 years, she lived in East Orange for a short period of time, moved to



Ruby Forney

Orange, returned to Montclair, and came back to Orange.

During her life, Forney has met many people she said she has cherished. One person in particular, she said, is Harold Kilpatrick, who looks after her and maintains daily contact with her.

Having been born prior to World War I, Forney has lived through many historical events. Sometimes, though, painful memories were a part of them.

Forney said her most heart-breaking experience was growing

up in a southern "Jim Crow" state. She said she remembers during World War II when black soldiers would come back from the front riding in the back of the train, then being pulled off by white men and being brutalized. Forney said she also remembers dogs attacking black people who tried to ride the bus on their way to work.

The death of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968 impacted Forney. She said she was saddened at how racial hatred could be tolerated and that a man who taught love and tolerance could be silenced at such a young age.

Seeing President Barack Obama inaugurated in 2009, said Forney, made her feel hopeful for America's future.

After 100 years, it would be safe to assume a person gathers much wisdom that could be passed along to future generations, and Forney is no different.

Forney said she hoped people could learn to "treat each other better" and "never forget to pray." She added that she hoped she has been able to guide others through offering words which may have provided encouragement.