

Diane Bell: *The African-American Experience in Wheeling*

Michael Nobel Kline: Today is May 6, and we're at Independence Hall. And would you say, "My name is."

Diane Bell: My name is Diane Bell.

MNK: And you -- I've been thinking ever since we talked at the restaurant the other day about, about that story you told about your -- Was it your grandmother?

DB: It had been my great grandmother. Yeah.

MNK: Can you give us a little about her name and where she lived, and see if you can recreate that story for us?

(008) DB: Okay, I can try. She -- Her name is Resus Cunningham. That's her married name. Her name was Resus Saunders at the time. She grew up in Martins Ferry. Her family was transported there by whatever means. Martins Ferry is in Ohio. She had met the Cunningham brothers, of which there were two at the time. There was Oliver, and I don't know the other one's name. Oliver come out the victor; so that's the one we all remember. She liked both of the brothers equally. They were land holders. In that time you always didn't have a lot of money, but you had property which was just as good. They both held property, so that was good. And they both liked her, and she just couldn't just make up her mind which one that she would marry. So she came up with this idea that she would have a foot race to see who would win her hand in marriage. Now this goes back to her heritage because she happened to be a Sioux Indian. The

(020) Sioux were always big on physical accomplishments. So for her to say a foot race, that was pretty typical. She decided that the winner of the race would be the one that she would marry. And they evidently made a big production out of the whole thing. They had a picnic and the whole nine yards. And then they held the foot race, and Oliver is the one who won the race. And that's who she ended up marrying, and then they had

five children from that marriage. But she married Oliver Cunningham. I'm not even sure of the date, 18 something. I'm not even sure when. It was the 1800s though.

MNK: That's a great story. Did the family tell other stories about her? She sounds --

(027) DB: We have some. My father, and this is real involved again because my father's really my great uncle. Going back a little bit for backup. In the African-American community and a lot of the other ethnic groups, you'd -- If people have kids out of wedlock or something happens to the parents, they die or whatever, you didn't send your kids out. Somebody else in the family took them in. So Resus Saunders Cunningham, her son Robert raised myself and my sister as his own children. But he's really my great uncle. He's my grandfather's brother. My grandfather took in my own natural brother, and my uncle took in myself and my sister when my mother abandoned us. So that's, that's what happened. But -- So it's all related, but it's not direct. He told us a lot of things about her, and she was the child of a slave and an Indian. He would always tell us that his grandmother, which would have been her mother, was an Indian princess. How true that is, we don't know. That's just what he always said. And he did have a couple old pictures of a very regally dressed Indian woman that he said was his grandmother, and that they had high stature. It has some backup on it because in order to have that, somebody had to have had money somewhere in order to even get here and to have land. So I don't know where it all came from. Our family owned, it's called Glens Run now. It used to be called Cunningham's Run because they all settled there, all the boys and their families. And a lot of the African-American people who relocated settled in that area. And we owned the whole area, the whole run. I don't know how many miles long it is, but we owned it. We still own a considerable portion of it, but it's now populated by a lot of other different people, but my family's still there. So we have a lot of stories growing up about the property. When Resus died, she left it in her will that the property can never be sold. And so we have -- There's parcels of property in Glens Run, Ohio, which is outside of Martins Ferry, that she owned that can never be sold. Not because of legal restrictions, but because the family's honoring her wishes from all those years ago. The

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(057) property that she had set up can never be sold. And anyone who's even remotely related to our family can go there and build a house if they want to. They can live there, they can do whatever they want. They want to farm it, whatever. It belongs to the Cunningham family, but it will never be sold. It's never been, any part of it, sold as far as I know. And that's since like 1820. Eighteen twenty-three or 1863, something like that, that she had even put that in writing. It's actually in writing at the Ohio County, I mean the Belmont County Courthouse. She's actually got that in her will, and it's in the paperwork over there. And it's still held in her name. It's never even been taken out of her name. But most the stories we had was about the coal mines because my father, who was my uncle, and I refer to him as my father because that's the way I think of him. And my grandfather --

MNK: ...

(066) DB: His name was Robert Cunningham. And there were three boys and four girls that she had. So it was him and his brother Charlie Cunningham and John Cunningham. Charlie died in World War I. He was a Doughboy. I guess that's what they called him. He died in World War I. But Robert, my father, worked in the coal mine as did his brother John and most the people in that area at that time worked in the ... Coal Mine or any of the other coal mines in the vicinity. But most of the stories he told us were about the coal mines and some family stuff, mostly about growing up on the Run and the people living there and everybody being sort of a community. And that sort of got done away with as years went down. By the time I grew up, there were maybe four families, Cunninghams left, on the Run. We still owned a lot of the property, but none of the people lived there. They all more or less moved away.

MNK: So at some point you came to Wheeling Island?

(079) DB: When I was 12, my mother lived -- Now my mother's a totally different story. She's a whole different family, and it's a story in itself. She's a Jackson and she married my father. Her family were also very well off for the time period we're talking about. For African-Americans, they were considered a well-off family. And my father's people were landed people. My mother's people were city people. They were both well off in their

own rights, but my mother's people had money and my dad's people had land. So it's kind of like you put the two together. But my mother didn't live in the country; she lived in the city, and she would -- At that time was Martins Ferry, and if you haven't been there, it's not like a city. But to them, living out in the country, it was the city. She lived in the city, and she went to private schools. Well most of the schools were private because black kids didn't go to school with the white kids. But she went to college. She was deaf, and she had gone to a deaf college and all this sort of thing. So she was more learned, if you will, than my father who quit school, I think at nine, to work in the coal mines. So there always was this problem at home that we lived in the country, but my mother preferred the city. She was like a shopaholic. She wanted to go all the time to buy stuff and all that. And my dad was more of the gardener, fishing type. So we had this conflict all the time. So by the time we got to be 11, I would have been 11, my sister would have been 13, something like that. And my mother decided that we should move to give the girls more opportunity. We were out in the sticks, you know, and we couldn't have a lot of friends and all that sort of thing. And as we got older, she said we needed to have more opportunity. So she decided that we would move. And of course everybody was devastated because we had barnyard animals as pets. We had a horse, we had a duck, we had a -- I used to tell everybody we had one of every kind of animal that you would find on a farm because -- We didn't have a farm, but we made it such. And our father was very indulgent, and he would give us whatever we wanted. And he was also very old at this time. Because when I was born, he was already 40 something or maybe even older than that. He was retired by the time I went to grade school, so he spent a lot of time with us kids and that. But she wanted to move, so my dad said okay. We bought a house on Wheeling Island. And we still owned the property in Martins Ferry like I said. Matter of fact, my brother lives there today. But we moved over here lock, stock and barrel and bought a house that was -- It was an old warehouse actually, and it was in really bad shape so we rented the house next door. And we renovated the one we were going to move in to. Coming from the type of people we came from, we're plain people and that, you didn't go out and get a plumber or carpenter. You did the

work yourself. So we were taught at an early age to do that sort of thing. So we went and we fixed the house up. My sister, my mother, my father, my brother, we all fixed up the house. And we subsequently moved in it and lived there. I was 11 before I had indoor plumbing. Even though -- See, that's what I mean, we lived really out in the sticks. Now we're talking 1960. And people had bathrooms and all of that. But where we lived at, we didn't have it. We had just gotten electricity before we moved. And we had kerosene lamps and outhouse. And we used to go to the well to get

(122) water. And for a person my age, that sounds really backwards because I'm only 39, and you think a 39 year old person wouldn't know about all that stuff. But that's the way I grew up. It was that backwards out there, and she just couldn't deal with it any more. So we moved into Wheeling, and that's how we got on the Island.

MNK: What was the address of the place?

(127) DB: It's 20 South York Street. Even the address is messed up. It's really -- It was really a different address. When the city rezoned the Island because it was always residential and all that, but for some reason they rezoned our house. And our house sat all by itself on a whole block. We owned the whole block. And when it was changed, instead of it being made into another number, where I'm sure it should have been 148 or something, it was just left at 20 as it was originally when the streets ran a different way. The streets ran on a slant. We bought the whole thing. It was originally two lots, and our house sat on one lot and the other lot was empty and there was like a side lot. The house was just torn down three months ago. It had a lot of history in it, but we couldn't help it because they want to build something on it, and they tore it down. But it was at 20 South York. You would not find it at 20 South York if you looked at numbers. You'd have to just know where the Cunningham house was.

MNK: Are there pictures of it?

(140) DB: I have some. Yeah. It was a -- Like most the houses on the Island, if you noticed them, they're all built the first level, which is the basement, was built from the ground up instead of being underground like most places, because of the flood area. Our buildings are all built one level up, and then you have living space.

MNK: So was this house, was it an African-American neighborhood there that you moved into?

(148) DB: No, at the time actually Wheeling Island had four African-American families when we moved there. And we made the fifth family. Also at the time we were the only ones who had kids my age. There was one more family that had a son my age, but I don't remember much about him. But everybody else had kids older than we were or no kids at all. So, no, it was definitely an all-white neighborhood when I moved in there. Which was a big adjustment for me and my sister, but not so much her because she was more outgoing than me.

MNK: How was it, how was it an adjustment, and what kind of adjustments did you make?

(156) DB: Well, even though living where we lived out in Glens Run, by the time I was old enough to go out and play about most of my friends were white, I went to white schools, but we always had our cousins and other African-American families around. Coming to Wheeling Island where there were no other kids, there was nobody else for me to play with except for white kids. And again, these are kids I don't know. So I had the same problems as any new kid in the neighborhood. You don't know anybody, and on top of that, they're all white kids and they don't necessarily want to know you. I had to go to school at Madison Elementary, which is on Zane Street, which was right across from where I lived at. And I had tremendous fights with my mother about this because I insisted on going to Clay Elementary, which was in East Wheeling, where all the other black kids were at. That's where everybody lived at, so that's where their school was.

(167) And she immediately told me no I couldn't go there. First of all the school was across the street from my house, so it was closer. The curriculum was considered a better curriculum. It's typical in African-American neighborhoods for people to feel like their kids don't get the best education because they always send the 'better' teachers somewhere else. I put better in quotes. They send them to other schools or to white schools. And my mother kind of believed that was they way it was. Not down playing anybody, but just saying that's just the way things were. This is what, 1966, something like that. And segregation and all that had been in place for about 10 years, 12 years, but not really in place.

MNK: Integration?

(178) DB: Yeah. The integration of schools and all that was supposed to have already been a done deal for a few years and especially in the northern schools it was supposed to be everything was okay. But that wasn't always the case, and she considered Madison just the better school. And over my objections, I had to go to Madison. Now my sister didn't have as many problems because she was in high school. And at that time, all the kids who lived on Wheeling Island, East Wheeling, Center Wheeling, they all went to Wheeling High School which is also now gone, which used to be at 20th and Chapline, which has recently been torn down. So she could go to school with all the other kids, whereas I had to go to a smaller elementary school with only white kids. The first two weeks of school I didn't talk to anybody at all. So they had the impression that I was Hispanic for some reason. And I didn't -- I don't know where -- I never, to this day, knew where they got the idea I was Hispanic, but they said I didn't look black and I don't talk what they consider black, so they never thought I was black. They thought I was Hispanic, which was more acceptable to them than a black student. So we straightened that out right away! After I finally got, I broke the ice with, I don't remember exactly whom, I have a feeling it was the girl who lived next door to my home. Her name was Barbara Bowman, and her sister was friends with my sister. And her sister's name was Linda. And her mother owned a bar in this area right in here, right downtown. And her mother, I think, because of that exposure was a little bit more understanding of color differences and things like that being exposed to different people

(200) from different places. And she's a well traveled person. And I think that made her kids a little bit more understanding. But I think I made friends with her first. And it was a long haul to make friends with anybody because I had a chip on my shoulder because I didn't want to be in that school first of all. Second of all, I was a tough little kid. I was a little hood I guess they would say now. I was, well not a bad kid, very opinionated, strong willed, did not want to go to that school. I was already into the Civil Rights Movement even though I was only like, you know a young person. I think I -- That was the seventh grade. So I was into all that and the whole nine yards. Martin Luther King,

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Malcolm X, Marcus Garby. Of course my mother had already told us a lot of stories and ingrained a lot of these values in us as we were growing up. So I wasn't about to back down to anybody, which was kind of like what was happening in this school. I got called names every day, and I subsequently beat up people every day! I didn't care, boys or girls, it didn't matter, I was really a rough kid. Coming from the country you swing on trees, you play outside. You know, you can handle yourself. And I never had to fight anybody before because of these. We fought over typical things. But this was the first time I ever had to actually fight people over the racial issue. And I probably could have done it another way, but being the kind of kid I was, for me that was the way to handle these people. So I would just beat them up every day! I would beat up somebody different depending on who slighted me, whether or not they intentionally did it or not. And I got sent to the office a lot and I tell them, I say, "You can expel me, you can punish me, you can do whatever you want, these kids aren't going to call me nigger and I'm not going to do nothing about it." So every day the principal would just shake his head when I'd come into the office and he'd say, "What did you do this time?" And I'd tell him what I did and I said what they did, and he goes, "Well I don't know what we're going to do." And I said, "Well you need to tell them to quit calling me names first of all, and then we'll be all right." That went on for the first six months that I was in school. Every day we'd fight. And then gradually the kids in school kind of separate themselves economically and socially as everybody knows. You have the kids who are the cheerleader type. At this time Madison -- Let me clarify that. Madison went to ninth grade. Now it only goes to the sixth grade. So we had an older group of kids in there. So we had basketball teams and all that. You had cheerleaders, you had kids whose parents were well off, and then you had kids who were on another level who were, let's say, dirt poor. Maybe their parents got general assistance or something like that. Then you had the working class kids. So you, you had like three different, three or four different levels of groups going on there. The kids who were, you know, the basketball players and the cheerleaders and the well off kids all kind of hung around together. And then you had the kids who were not real well off that hung around together. And then kind of like right in between, I

found a group of people and a group of girls that didn't really care so much about the color thing. I never had to beat any of them up. And we kind of, for whatever reason, started hanging around together. And that's kind of like the group I stayed in all the way through high school. With this working class people's kids who, as long as you're good to them, they didn't really care what color you were. So we kind of all hung out, and we had a little gang going. And if somebody got mad at somebody else, then we would go up and take care of that. Whether it be with words or fists, whatever it happened to be. I had sit-ins by myself during this time. Whenever something would happen, they would say well so and so -- Now these are very radical

(254) times we're talking about and there's a lot of things going on across the country. And even though I was in an all-white school, I was determined to keep my radical opinions, and I would just go sit in and the principal would come out and say, "What are you doing?" And I said, "I'm sitting in because of --" Whatever happened, whether it was Martin Luther King was having something going on, if there was a sit-in he was doing or -- And then when he died and all that. The whole nine yards. We would just do whatever it was. And sometimes I'd be by myself, and sometimes a group of girls would come out and sit with me. But for the most part, I was allowed to do it because it was, there was only one person doing it. It was just me. The principal kind of laughed it off and you know. Okay, she's out there, just let her alone! And the school's on a main highway, so I would sit out there with my little sign or whatever, and the cars would go by and all that sort of thing. Sometimes I'd leave school and try to go to the high school

(266) where they were having demonstrations at that time. There was a lot of demonstrations and things like that going on in Wheeling. A lot of civil rights things.

MNK: Do you remember any particular one, any --

(269) DB: There was so many. I remember the rioting that happened when King died, and the participation we had here. We did have participation here. Matter of fact, we had to write soul sister on our house. Soul brothers.

MNK: Can you say that again?

(283) DB: We had to write soul sister or soul brother on our house. Living on the Island as we did was considered a white community, and when people rioted, which they did. You would think this was a major city the way -- I mean property was vandalized. They broke windows downtown. I myself broke a few. I'm a very radical person. I channel it other ways now, thank goodness. But at that time, I was right over here with everybody else. My mother never knew that; she would have killed me. But I ran right over here and everybody was crying and hollering and upset because of King being killed. And they broke windows, and I don't think anybody looted. I don't remember that part. I do remember people trying to set fire to things. And I remember talk about people, we're going to go to the Island and tear it up because it was a white community and it was closer than going to Elm Grove and tearing up Elm Grove. You could walk to the Island. So we had to write so people would know that someone black lived there, and they wouldn't do anything to our house. And some houses were vandalized, but I don't know how far they got into our --

Carrie Nobel Kline: Who wrote on the house, and what did they write?

(288) DB: I did. I just wrote 'soul brother' and 'soul sister.' 'Blacks live here,' 'black power.' I wrote it on the windows with soap. I told my mom, I said, "You know you have to do this." She's like okay, go ahead and do it then. There was a lot of stuff going on. They had a lot of interracial dating going on at the high school that caused a lot of problems. There were fights and mini riots, if you want to call them, in the school system because of the teachers and all that sort of thing, not liking it. By the time I got to high school, we had council and groups that were African-American to try to, you know, bridge that gap we were getting between the black students and the white students. There was a lot of unfair things going on. A lot of racial things that we were trying to straighten out. But during that whole period, the whole time from the time we moved here until I was in high school, there were a lot of things going on in this area. Urban renewal came in and stripped the homeowners out of the area. The African-American homeowners, what I mean, and caused a lot of problems that way. So there was a lot of turmoil. When they had the march on Washington and King had them march on Washington, the bus

stopped here to pick up people here, so it's always been a point -- You know even though we're a small town, it's still been closely related to everything that is going on nationally, nation wide.

CNK: Where did the bus stop? How many people got on? What was that trip like?

(310) DB: My mother wouldn't let me go. I was at that time, if I can't remember the year -- If I could remember the year, I could tell you how old I was, but it was before '67. So I couldn't have been very old. And she would not let me go. And I screamed and I ranted and I carried on that she didn't care about the black cause, and I did all my chanting and stuff. And she said, "You're still not going no matter what." But I know that Miss Thelma Griffith went. So maybe if you get to talk to her, she can tell you because she actually went. She can tell you how many people from here went, where the bus came to and all that sort of thing. But I know that they had advertised they were coming through here. All the presidential candidates and all used to stop here. Nixon and Kennedy and I remember when George Wallace came through here. I had a little mini riot for that. Just a lot of things used to happen here that don't any more. But back then in the '60s and '70s, this was like one of the hubs for activity for this part of the country.

CNK: What kind of demonstrations do you remember other than the riot when King died?

(327) DB: There's been small demonstrations where people went down to city council to protest the city government doing things. And they would just go en masse and just -- It would be word of mouth thing, you know. And you'd all go down there. I remember picketing. I don't remember exactly for what, but I remember that we picketed at the courthouse. But again, Miss Thelma would probably be your best bet for all that because at that time, even though I was a young person, she was one of the spearheads of this stuff that was going on. So she would know. I remember we did it, I remember going, I remember protesting they wouldn't take care of the Nelson Jordan Center which was the only city-owned recreation center in Wheeling, and it's in East Wheeling. And we still fight that and protest it. When urban renewal came along, they -- Urban renewal, they tried to stop that from happening because the people knew what would happen if urban renewal came in. It does nothing like what it say it's going to do. What it does is it takes

homeowners and takes the backbone of your community out and puts businesses and other things in. Which is -- They protested that a lot, and the only -- Every time urban renewal's come into this area, we've protested it because all it does is break up the community more. So it's always been knowing the national things that happen that makes people protest. But it was also things, regional things that happened here that they protested. After urban renewal took out most the homeowners, that all kind of died away because you took the people who were the backbone of the community out; and if they got enough money, they moved away to somewhere else. They moved further out and you lost the stability of the neighborhoods. So we lost a lot of the people who were the background and the backbone of these movements were now gone. They were no longer in the picture.

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MNK: What was the response of the greater community to these demonstrations and -- Did they come down pretty heavy with --

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DB: I -- Again, being a kid, I don't remember anybody getting in a lot of trouble. I know that the police beat up people. I know that they sent the police in and, you know, people were chased off the streets. It would have been a lot worse in a big city, I will say that. There would have been some people probably got killed or went to jail for a long time or something like that. I remember a lot of protesting and a lot of times where you -- Seems to me there was even a curfew that you couldn't be downtown at a certain time and stuff like that. I don't think there was much repercussion. And I don't think it made a lot of difference to the people in the area. Because a lot of them actually commiserated with the fact that King was dead. As did a lot of people all over the country. But they didn't like the idea of people actually taking law into their own hands or going out and feeling the way everybody felt and all that. I don't think it was sympathetic at that point. I don't really think it made a big difference to people around here, not on the whole. Because the only ones it mattered to is the people who actually had their property destroyed. It was like big write ups in the paper and things like that, but that was about it. That's all I remember about that. So I think you're best

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bet's either Miss Thelma or the newspaper even for back then.

CNK: So that was when you were in elementary school?

DB: Elementary and high school. Seventh, eighth and ninth grade. And continued on through high school because that whole period was getting to be a real radical period for African-American people. And by the time I got out of high school -- I left the area in 1974. I left Wheeling and went to Europe.

CNK: Will you back up and tell us about high school? After hearing about this white elementary school --

(389) DB: Okay. The high school was a mix, but not a strong mix. It was -- It was a better mix than you had, but you still had different factions going on. Then now you threw in not only the kids who had a lot of money because at that time, kids from all over the area went to Wheeling High School. So you had a mix that way, but you never really had the real rich, rich kids who lived out in Elm Grove. But you had the better off kids, you had the middle income kids whose parents worked. You had some professional people's kids. You had the real poor kids from both sides, you know, from black families and from white families. And you threw in the South Wheeling faction which was a lot of times really anti-African-American. You had to deal with that. You had the kids from the Island who were about the same type of mix. Then on top of that, you threw in East Wheeling kids, which was predominantly black kids. So that's going to make for a lot of problems in any school. But not as much as a lot of the big cities had, of course. But we still had a lot of problems. I didn't date in high school. I had one boyfriend the whole time I was there, the captain of the basketball team and the football team. A real athletic guy. So I didn't have a lot of contact with the other kids because I dated one

(411) guy. And I hung out with his friends who happened to be mostly white, but some black. But they were all the jocks so we all went somewhere, you went with the jocks. So we didn't -- Sports seemed to transcend those racial lines for the most part. So we were kind of like in with a group of kids who were in that mode of thinking. But I do remember going to a lot of government meetings, student government meetings about the racial things that were going on. I had somewhat cooled out a little bit, I think, as far as my own radical feelings. I had fought my battles, as far as I was concerned, at

Madison School. And the kids I went to school with never gave me any problem. Matter of fact, nobody gave me any problem. I was considered a little hoodlum. I was a good student, and I didn't give anybody in school any trouble, but my reputation had proceeded me. So nobody never really bothered me, black or white. So I never had any problems. And I took karate in high school and that made it even worse. So it was kind of like we were always -- My sister and I really never fit in with the typical people here. We weren't white so we didn't fit in with the white kids. And while we were African-American, we were considered -- I don't know how to say it, but we weren't from Wheeling, we didn't have any relatives over here. We were originally from Ohio even though we lived over here. We dressed a little bit better than the other kids did. Not that we had more money, it's just our mother raised us different. And there were only two of us and most of our friends came from large families and that sort of thing. So we were considered a little bit different, you know. So we never really fit in, because the black kids didn't totally accept us. And then we were lighter skinned than most of the people and that has a whole other list of problems in the African-American race color wise has a lot to do with where you are socially. We wore make-up. We just did a whole lot different things that the folks here didn't do. So we didn't fit in with either side, so we were kind of like in the middle. It made it more difficult for my sister because she was a straight A student and a goody two shoes as far as everybody was concerned. And they would easily pick on her, but she would still stand up for herself. I didn't have that problem because I went with the captain of the basketball team and nobody was going to bother me because of reputation I already had. So I didn't see a lot of the problems that was going on. I didn't see them until they came before student government or somebody said something or teacher or principal. The principal was notorious for mistreating the African-American students, in treating people unfairly and all that sort of thing. But it was like it was always taken care of as a group. Like everybody tried to work the problems out. And there were two times I remember in high school that they had actual riots in the school. But for the life of me, I can't remember now what they were about. I mean people got hurt and went to the hospital. It was that

bad. There were fist fights and it was among students, black students against white students. At one time there was a huge fight at Wheeling Park that ended up being -- They said it was black and white, but it wasn't. It was really Wheeling, Ohio. But at the time that this big fight happened, they said it was black and white and it was nowhere near that. But this particular time at school, there were black and white fights. And that happened maybe two times major. Happened all year round, minor, but major two times. And we had dances here right across the street at the B&O, used to be a place where the kids would go to dance. And there wasn't much problem there.

(473) The problems were when you got in school, I think, more than anything else. Because everybody seemed to get along at the functions that were designed for teenagers, but it was when you got in school atmosphere because I think the teachers kept it going. Because they treated the kids unfairly, and they showed favoritism. So the white kids would think, you know, it must be okay for me to do this, for me to think that way. Because we didn't seem to have problems too much in a social setting. It was more when you go to school than anything else. Around here, anyway.

MNK: So if you went out to a dance, at a local dance, people could dance with anybody they wanted to?

(481) DB: For the most part. We had some kids of course that couldn't handle it. But it was just like a whole different community. All the African-American kids all kind of hung out together. They all kind of live in the same area. And when you -- If you mess with somebody, you had to fight 10 or 12 people. You're not going to just fight one person. And that's a pretty strong deterrent for you not bothering anybody. Whether or not you agreed with what they're doing. Like after a dance, you might see 30, 40 kids all walking home at once. You're not going to confront somebody. Whereas not it's a little bit more -- We're more spread out and it's not such a strong community. I really feel like that. Because I think there's a lot more racial problems now with the kids then there was then. Everybody kind of stood in their own ground. They stood their own place. You know you had some interracial dating and at that time it wasn't popular with the African-American students. And if you did it, the African-American students were the

ones who jumped on you. You know, if you're from our community and you're dating somebody white, then they would jump on you. It's kind of reversed itself now. We kind of like say, well date whoever you want, but some people in the white community still have that problem. I think it's a little bit worse now. I do, yeah.

MNK: Worse now?

(506) DB: Yeah, I do. I think it's worse now. I was thinking about this the other night. My brother -- This is again, this is that extended family stuff. My brother's really my nephew. He's my brother's son, but we were all raised as brother and sister in the house. He's my nephew, so I'll call him my nephew. My nephew married a white girl. And this has only been about six years ago. Maybe not even that long. Now that's not very long, that's back in 1980 something. I was in Europe at the time. I wasn't back home. No, I was in Pennsylvania. But, anyway, he'd dated this girl for a long time and this was -- He went to Park the first year they put Park up there. Park was a consolidate school. They did away with all the local high schools and made one big high school, which was a big mistake. And what happened then, you put all the wealthy kids now, are now going to school with all the other groups we were talking about earlier. And it's a big, huge school, and it's state-of-the-art and all that stuff. But the

(525) first year, you had all these kids together. He met a girl from Elm Grove, not well-off family, but financially okay. Her brothers hated him from day one. My brother, my nephew is also half white because his mother is white. My brother married a white woman also. So he married this girl, and right before they got married, her brother said well you guys are going to get married, forgive and forget and everything's fine. They offered to take him out for this sort of bachelor thing. They take him to the bar that was like a little neighborhood bar right down the street from our home where he was still living. And they drank and they carried on, and when they left, they went out the door and they proceeded to beat him with baseball bats. And they broke both of his legs and his arms and put him in the hospital and said, "You're not marrying our sister, that's all there is to it." But they beat him within an inch of his life, and they put him in the hospital. He still married the girl. They're still married. Now they have two kids. But,

I mean, this thing is still not over. This racial thing is still not over. People still have very strong feelings about it. So this is back in -- I know it wasn't even '86, something like that. That's not very long ago. That's the type of attitude, you know, even though she was grown and he was grown, it didn't matter. It was still a black and white thing, and it doesn't matter that he was only half black. The fact that he was black was enough. But they beat him up really bad, and it wasn't the first time. They had beat him up a couple other times before that, but this was the worst they'd beat him because they beat him with a baseball bat. But there have been people killed in this area because of interracial dating. It's never -- It's never going to change I don't think. It's more prevalent, but I don't think it's going to change. People still don't like it. On both sides. But it still happens a lot. When you go to bigger cities and you all are from a different place, you'll know that, you don't see it as much as you do here. If you drive up around through here, you'll see little brown babies all over the place from having mixed parentage. But I mean, when I bring my friends here from other places, they're astounded at the fact that it's just done at all. You know I mean, for whatever reasons. I personally don't care for it, even though my brother married a white woman. I never liked her, never will. Not because of her being white, but because of the person she is. Plus my mother never liked her. I think that had a lot to do with it. And then his child married a white woman, and she's the sweetest little girl there is, but what I see is the problems their children have. Where do they fit in? And I think fine and dandy, you can marry whoever you want to, and a lot of my friends disagree with this, but I really feel that way. You have to think about what's going to happen in the future. And that's what they didn't do. They didn't think about what was going to happen with their kids when people call their kids names. Or when she has the kids and somebody says to her, "Why do you got those little black kids?" Well what is she going to say, "Well these are my kids." If she's brave, she'll say these are my kids, if not she'll make up a story or whatever, you know. But I think you got to look at all the sides of something before you jump into it. That's just the way I feel, but I would never

(588) condemn anybody, and I certainly love my niece and nephew and everybody else that's bi-racial. I don't really make any ..., I just feel sorry for this kid growing up because I've seen too many of them, including my own niece and nephew, go through identity crisis when they get to be about 12, 13 years old and wondering which culture they fit into. Where do I go, where do I belong, what do I do? And there's a lot of kids that go through that because of this. And I think that's the only reason I don't like it. I don't care for it.

MNK: What about your own kids. What kind of issues have they had to face growing up here?

(600) DB: Well my kids hate it here first of all. They -- I had my second daughter in Germany. Of course we lived there for three, three and a half years, and moved to Pennsylvania. So my kids grew up in the suburbs till we moved back here. I've always been real active in any community I've lived in. So they've always been exposed to all different kinds of communities including when I lived in Europe. I lived on, with the Germans. I didn't live on a base, I lived in the community so my daughter spoke German and Spanish. And I came back home. I moved to Pennsylvania, and we lived in an all-white neighborhood again. Somehow I seem to end up in these wonderful neighborhoods! So my daughter had the same problem I did. She went to an all-white school when she started school. But it was -- There it wasn't what color you were, it was how much money you made. So that's kind of like the times have changed to that point by the time she went, started school. And that's the one you just met. It was how much money you made and what kind of house you had, what kind of car -- It wasn't what color you were because they really didn't care what color you were. They wanted to know how much money we made. So we did pretty good there. We lived there for about 10 years, then we moved back here. Once we came back here, then they had problems. I would not say that there were no racial problems when we lived away from home, because there are always racial problems. They weren't exposed to any. I put her in private school when we moved into the city. I put her in private school because in the city you don't

(633) send your kids to public school if you can help it. It's just a fact. No matter what color you are, if you can afford private school, you put your kid in private school. So when we came back here, and she went to Catholic school back here. She went to Central. The

other ones were younger when I moved home, and they didn't have any problems at all. And I didn't work, so I stayed home with them. So we just did a lot of things -- The only comment I can remember them making growing up was, "Why are we always the only black people any time we go somewhere." Because I go to museums, and I go to the Lollipop Concerts and I would take them to all these cultural events. But there weren't any other black folks there when we would go. And they would get upset and say, "We're always the only black kids, why you always drag us to these places?" We went to a church on the Island which was all white church, you know, and all that. They just, they just never did like it here from day one. We did a lot of traveling away from home. More or less to get some culture, because there's not much culture here in Wheeling. And once you're exposed to a lot of different things, you want it. We would take the kids and go places. There have been fights. I know my kids got into fights in, maybe at

(661) Triadelphia Middle School. I think Tammy did before she went to college, before she went to Central, she had a few racial problems, but they kind of ironed them out themselves. The only time I ever had to even get involved in it was when there was an argument between one of the doctor's kids who went to school was a cheerleader, and Tammy who ran track and was basketball player and all that. They wanted to -- They had words and the girl called my daughter a name, and Tammy called her a name back and then she smacked her in the face and all this other -- So the school called me, but they didn't call the other girl's parents. They treated her as a victim, but my daughter as the aggressor. And I said tell me what happened, and then the principal told me. And she told me. And I asked the little girl, and she said well that's right. I don't have to take that from her type of thing. I said well she doesn't have to take anything from you either. You just can't call people out their name and not expect them to do something. And the parents came, and we're going to sue you and all this other -- And I said, "Well go ahead and sue me then, I don't really care. If you think you got grounds, go ahead." But it was a case of where they thought their money would intimidate us.

(688) And I told them at that time, "Well you're not dealing with somebody from East Wheeling." And that's negative on my part because a lot of times you have even in your

own mind that thinking. I said, "You're dealing with somebody who will take it to the maximum, and I don't care. You're not going to push my kid around because of her color or anything else." But that was the only time I remember -- And that ended up neither kid got suspended. Neither one needed to be suspended. It was a disagreement that they could have ironed out. But because she was wealthy, the school wanted to appease her family. Once you bring that kind of thing to the table and tell them what they're trying to do, and they actually see that you know what they're trying to do, sometimes they back down. The girls, my two youngest. I call them the girls. I have four kids. Three girls and a boy. And the three oldest ones are -- I have one who's graduated Central and two in Park. And the two younger ones I call the girls all the time. I have not have any trouble with them. They both been excellent students. Renee was a cheerleader all through school starting at grade school, Madison. She went to the same school I went to. And they would come home of course and say, "Mom, what were you doing when you were young?" Because some of the teachers are still there and the principal at that time was still there. And they would say, "All we do is hear about you were always in the office," and this, that and the other. It's like they would just tell them we aren't going to have any trouble with you like we did your mom. They had that to deal with, but they never got in trouble. They were very good students, very involved in school. They had all the advantages that I considered we had all fought for up to that point. So I think my kids were pretty lucky in that respect. They were good kids, they're attractive kids, intelligent. So the teachers kind of like, you know, treated them like they would anybody else. I never had any trouble. My son from day one had trouble. He's a good student, he's intelligent, he's attractive kid. And he's a big kid. That's been his biggest problem, is the fact that he's a big person. I can't understand it. Now when he got to be about in the third or fourth grade is when the trouble started. That's also when he started --

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(side two)

MNK: ... basis for a book.

DB: Okay, we were talking about my son. He was five foot tall by the time he was in the fourth grade. His teacher was only like four foot eight, something like that. And they

had a lot of trouble -- It seemed like the two girls skated through school and didn't have any problems as much as he did. And I don't know if that means that the racial issues are coming more to the forefront or the climate's changing. But he had a lot more to deal with, more like what I had to deal with. Although he wasn't the only black kid in the school, there were only a handful by this time of black kids going to a school. And there was always racial problems all the time. And they would always say there's no racial problems, but there were. And he got called names a lot. He's a very big person, but he's also very mild and meek person. He's been wrestling and playing baseball since he was about six years old. And part of that discipline in sports is that you don't fight, you're a good sport. And his is that. He exemplifies that. That's just the way he is. He's a very big person. Right now he is almost six foot tall, and he weighs about 145 pounds. And he's only 12 years old. He's bigger than my husband. So it's like, here's a kid who's 12 years old that's huge. People just don't know how to deal with him. So he has a lot of problems because of that. But this particular problem he was having in grade school. The kids -- Every day this one boy would call him a nigger every time he turned around. And Jay would not do nothing. So one day he pushed him, and he said, "You know I'm sick of you calling me names. I've told the teacher, you won't stop." So he pushed the kid. And this kid's smaller than him, course he goes flying. So of course the school calls me, and the teacher calls me. He starts to tell me we can't have Jay pushing the students and blah, blah, blah. I said, "Well what happened?" He tells me, "Well this boy called Jay a nigger, and he pushed him." I says, "Well then why are you calling me?" And he says, "Well Mrs. Biggs, we can't allow this behavior." I said, "Well you need to call this boy's parents and tell his parents that he can't be calling my son names." He -- This guy does not know that he picked the wrong person to say okay, we can't be nonviolent. I believe in nonviolence, but there comes a time when you have to stand up also. But so he said, "Well you don't understand that nigger's not necessarily a derogatory term." And I just kind of like lost it, and I was in the office and I said, "Excuse me, what are you talking about?" I'm like how could you possibly know whether that term's derogatory or not. And he goes on to tell me where the word came from and

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all this and it came from the Greek. And I said, "You can't explain to me nothing about where the word came from or any connotation on it." I said, "I can't even believe that you would try. I understand that you think that you're a professional person and everything else, but you don't know anything about it. So then don't try to tell Jay he can't retaliate." I said, "If you won't tell this young man not to degrade my son, I'm not going to tell my son not to defend his self. And he just couldn't believe that I would say that as a parent. And I said, "I'm over to the school now and I'm going to explain it to you face to face." And he's like, "Well you don't have to --" And I says, "Well yes I do." So I hung up the phone, and I went over to the school and I told him --

(038) I said, "Let's go to the principal's office. Let's go." I got him right out of class, and we went. I told him, I said, "You people have to realize that you can't allow your students to degrade anybody in this school. Because they wanted me just to tell Jay to ignore them. And he had been ignoring them, and he just got tired of it. And I said, "I won't tell him to ignore you." I said, "If there was a person here in a wheelchair and they called him cripp every day or said 'you only got one leg,' would you tell them to ignore that? No. If there was a retarded person, you wouldn't tell them to ignore somebody calling retard all day, so why should I let you call my son names all day and lower his self-esteem and not say anything?" I said, "So you will get these students in line, and it's not an if, and, or but. It is a 'you will get these students in line and tell them they cannot do that.' " I think that what happened is, over the years people had got to the point where you didn't talk about racial things anymore, or you just ignored them. So you didn't teach your kids that you don't do that. So I said, "You're going to teach them they don't do it or else Jay's going to be here every day pushing this kid who bothers him." Well we ended up having the problem all solved because I told him, I said, "I am not going to reprimand Jay for this, you will not put him out of school, he will not do detention, he will not have anything else happen to him." I said, "You get this young man in line." Well the guy eventually quit calling Jay names, for the teachers started putting the boy on detention. If he would call Jay a name, Jay would go tell them and they would put him on detention. So that ended that problem. And he made it through grade school okay, and he got to his

first year at Triadelphia Middle School. And at this time, he's about as big as he is now, he's in the sixth grade. This was just this year.

(059) And he was in the sixth grade, and he had trouble with the little boy from this Madison who came to the school with him. And this boy was his friend, little white kid's his friend. And I mean little in stature, small boy. And he has a mouth like you wouldn't believe. Always talking against people. One of the kids, friend of his, dad committed suicide and the boy would make remarks about the boy's father. You know, '... why your dad killed yourself' and that kind of thing. And he always thought that he would run behind Jay, and Jay would protect him from the other kids because they were friends. Well this went on through Madison. That's what happened. Jay would more or less tell the other kids, well don't pick on him, blah, blah, blah. They got to the school and Jay makes new friends at a new school, how kids are want to do. And this little fellow was in the back of the bus and they were coming back from a program here called REAP, where they take the kids out for a country setting and to Oglebay. And they go for a week. And they were coming back from this trip, and evidently Jay sat two seats in front of this little boy who would call people names and talk about their parents and all that. And he talked about the boy next to him's parents. And the boy next to him reaches over and he punches him in the face. Now my son turns around and is like 'yeah, get him, get him.' He's doing like that, but all the other kids on the bus are doing the same thing. So they come home. I get a call from the assistant principal saying that Jay's been suspended from school for three days. So I call him up to find out -- You know, you have to do this. There's a whole procedure you follow. And I says, "What happened?" And he told me what happened. I says, "Well on this paper, it says 'Jay was suspended for fighting.'" I said I know better, Jay doesn't fight. As big as he is, he does not -- That's one of our problems with him, he won't fight back even when people attack him. And I said, "I know he doesn't fight so I think you need to tell me what happened." And he says, "Well he didn't hit anybody, he verbally abused somebody." And I said, "Okay, what did he say?" He said, "We're not exactly sure what he said, but he's so big that he intimidates

people." I said, "Wait a minute right there. I'm on my way to the school." Because I can't see how just because your size can be used against

(086) you. So I went out there and I said, "Now tell me what happened." I had already heard from my son what happened. That there was a fight on the bus. Two other boys beat up the one boy who was mouthing off. I said, "What did you do?" He said, "I didn't do anything but turn around and say 'yeah, get him, get him.' But so was everybody else on the bus." And I said, "Well, you know you shouldn't even have been in it at all, but I'm going to go hear what they got to say." So we're talking and they're telling me everything except for what Jay could have said or what he did. And I says, "Well

(092) how can you suspend somebody who never left their seat." He never left his seat during the entire incident, all he did was turn around in his chair. But they suspended him for more days than the other two boys who actually hit somebody. And he said, "Well our rule here is if you fight, you're suspended automatically, and Jay's a smart mouth so we gave him extra time." I said, "Oh, I see, you gave him extra time." So I said, "Okay."

(097) Went home, then we made an appointment to talk with the principal. Went in and talked to him. And he said, "Oh, nice to meet you," blah, blah, blah. "I remember you from school." I never met this man in my life. It was like I remember -- I was like, no I didn't go to school here, and I didn't go to school anywhere else you taught. And my husband's not from here, so you don't remember either one of us. So it was kind of like that as soon as we got in there. And he said, "Well this is the rule we have, kids who fight --" I said, "Jay didn't fight, he didn't leave his seat, so how can you suspend him?" He said, "Well, we'll try to work out something, but we can't allow these kids to come from Madison with their trouble and bring it here to our school." And I said, "Oh really, what do you mean these kids from Madison?" "Well all these kids who come from Madison are not going to come here and do this. We're going to make an example." I said, "Not with my child you're not." I said, "I happen to know that there are certain rules you have to follow in any school system before you can suspend somebody." He goes, "Well, it can be done at the discretion of this person or that person." I said, "No, it can't." So we said, he said, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give your son 10 days in school

suspension. He can come to school Monday." This was Thursday. I said, "No, that's not good enough. My son comes to school today. I brought him with me, he comes to school today." And he's like, "Well that's just not possible." I said, "He comes to school today, then we'll talk about the 10 days." So they let Jay back in and they said, "We're going to have these 10 days suspension." And he tells me, "Off the record, I'm holding these days over your son's head. If he does anything else, I will have him put out of this school." So I said, "Oh, okay, you want to put that in writing?" It's like, no it's off the record. I says, "Well, okay, fine." It just so happens school board met that Monday, and this was like Thursday, so we bided our time. We waited, I went and got the actual rule book of the Ohio County School System to see what rights we had. And so we went.

(121) And I had -- First they wouldn't put us on the agenda, which is illegal. They have to put you on the agenda if you ask to be put on the agenda. They wouldn't let us on the agenda. So I was like, oh, it's like that. So I had already been and had problems with school board before, and that's a whole other story. I did have trouble with them with unrelated things to my own kids. And I said, "I want on this agenda, and that's all there is to it." And they said, "You can't. There's certain channels you have to follow." I said, "We followed all your channels. I want on the school board agenda for tonight." And they said no. So we came anyway because it's an open meeting, anybody can come. And we were sitting there in the front row, and we just saw a bustle of activity out of the corner of our eye. School board people were looking around. And I'm already known as an outspoken person, so it's kind of like if I'm there, I'm there for a reason as far as they're concerned. And Terry Gosa, if I can use names, is on the school board. He's an African-American, the only one I believe they've ever had on the school board. He was appointed to that particular office, came out and he said, "Well, what are you guys doing here?" They evidently sent him as an emissary. I said, "Well, we're here to discuss the problem we're having at Triadelphia with our son." He said, "Well, I thought it was all taken care of." I said, "I don't think 10 days suspension in school takes care of anything." So he ran back in the back, and the next thing I know the secretary comes

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and says, "Superintendent would like to see you." So we get hustled into the office and he introduces himself and says, "Well, what are you here for?" And it's very threatening to have parents come to the school board. And that's not a good sign. But it is -- And when it's black parents, it's extremely threatening. They get very upset. So they're asking us all these questions and we're getting this whole red carpet treatment. And we went along to the superintendent what was going on. Well in comes the principal and the vice principal. They thought it was important enough, they called them from home to be there. Come here now type of thing. So we're all in there and they're both have this quizzical look on their face. "Well, Mr. and Mrs. Bell we thought we straightened all this out." I says, "Maybe for you, you straightened it out." I says, "But I refuse to let my son be punished because of his color and because of his size." And they said, "Well, it's nothing about that." I said, "Well, I'm sorry, but --" And I also log things when I'm in the middle of something like that. And I said -- I got my little book out and said, "Well, Mr. Bauer said that my son was intimidating, and that my son's big for his age." I said, "That sounds to me like you have a problem and it's just his size." I said, "There's nothing here about what he did, just that he can be intimidating and he's big for his size." And I said, "Now if you can expel somebody for that, I want to know that right now because I think I got a good lawsuit going right here." And they're kind of like no, it wasn't because of that. I repeatedly asked, asked them why. And it turned out that the mom of the boy who got beat up felt that Jay should have protected her son. And instead of her even going to the kids who beat up her son, she -- I found that the school, had attacked my son, and the principal let her do that. And I brought that up because one of the teachers called me. That's one of the advantages of being involved in a lot

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of things, people know you. One of the teachers had called me and told me that she had actually, you know, had her finger in my son's chest like this and yelling at him, screaming at him and cursing and the whole nine yards. And the principal let her do this. So I had that information, which he was totally surprised that I even knew about that. And I had the information that my son wasn't involved in the fight, and the information that he was the only minority kid involved in the whole thing. And I -- And

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they wanted to make an example of him, and I told them I would not allow them to do it. I said, "I don't care what you say, what you do. Unless he's done something wrong, if he's done something wrong, by all means punish him. But if he hasn't done anything wrong, don't give him a black mark and have it go through his school record." They had already put on his school record that he was a troublemaker and all these other things. And I'm like where do you get that from. We're talking about a boy who's an athlete and a B student, who's never had less than a B in school, where do you get that he's a troublemaker? He's never been in trouble, never had any problems. But because this mother comes in here and tells you that he should have, look how big he is, he could have protected my son. That you're going to expel him for that? I don't think so. So we went around the whole nine yards and the principal is very upset that his superintendent followed through and did away with the suspension. He had Jay's record expunged, you know, he had everything taken off there that they had put on. He made them apologize to myself and my husband and to my son because they had really just totally did this whole thing -- I mean there was no reason for this whole thing to have happened. But they were upset because the school board didn't back them. This same principal's had racial problems all along. It just so happens he got a hold of the wrong person. But they ended up, my son was not in trouble, and I also told him -- I also informed him that he has said he will hold these over his head, so if he ever gets in trouble -- And then of course the superintendent says, "You can't do anything like that. What's the matter with you?" to the principal. And like my husband and I did not laugh or anything. We were just like really cool, calm and collected. And we got the whole matter straightened out, and my son didn't do any days and -- Now if he does something wrong, they'll call me and tell me. But if it's something ludicrous, they won't even bother to try to make up something and tell me because I'm not going for it. But after this all went over in the office, my husband and I got up and we went back to the school board room. And they came back out and they goes, "Well, didn't we take care of everything?" We said, "Well yes you did, but we still have a right to stay here and listen to what's going on." And during the meeting they, because my name was added to the agenda -- So we weren't

going to leave. And I got up and I told them, I said, "We had a problem, it was a racial problem at Triadelphia Junior High School, it was taken care of in Mr. Miller's office. But we want you to know that as citizens and parents, we will be watching this school system to see what else is going to happen." And then we sat back down, and that was it. But there was some pretty nervous people for a while! But it's just -- You have to put people on record some time and on notice to let them know that you're not going -- So that's, knock wood, the only problems I've ever had in the school system. It was a long story.

MNK: A great story.

(206) DB: They're some doosies around here!

MNK: As you were -- You seem to have had almost a precocious awareness as an 11, 12 year old about your own African-American culture, the stuff that was going on nationally. You were conducting these lone pickets in the school. Did that awareness include a sense of the history or the heritage of the black community in Wheeling? What sense --

(214) DB: No, I don't really think so because -- And I owe all that to my mother. Being as they were very much older. Because again, they were my grand aunt and uncle. They weren't the age of my parents. They were older. My father was retired by the time I was living with him. We had that advantage of having lived with people who would be like your grandparents. We were very indulged. Our parents were very indulgent and gave us whatever we wanted. If we wanted to go to a movie, my father would take us to the movie. It was not like -- We were spoiled is what people would say. And that included some knowledge of our own family history, more national history. My mother was a very well read person. She was deaf like I had indicated. She was deaf, but she kept on top of everything. She read constantly, as do I and my sister both. We both got that from her. She read anything and everything that she could get her hands on. She read underground newspapers during the civil rights era, like papers that were put out about the black panthers, and all that sort of thing. She was on mailing lists like you wouldn't believe. She was also semi-reclusive; she didn't leave the house. So her whole world was whatever she got in the mail or on television, which she had one of the first closed

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captioned TVs ever made. And before that, she had machines that, you know, she could tell what was going on with different things on the phone and that sort of thing. She, like I said, she watched television a lot. She wrote all over the country and the world to different people. She also dealt in antiques. So she had a lot of contacts that way. But she was a very learned person, and she pushed that on us. So we were, by osmosis almost, you know, exposed to a lot of different things at an early age. Like I said, being that they were so old, they raised us in an old way, if you can understand what I mean. By that I meant there was a lot of old I collected vintage clothing when I was a child because of her interest in her younger years. But those clothes by the time I came out were vintage. So I collected those old clothes. We attended auctions. And I grew up around the kids from Elm Grove because of the auctions we went to which are usually people that are well off or wealthy. We went to estate auctions every Saturday. So we didn't really grow up with the kids in East Wheeling. That was a lot of time -- Like I said, that was part of our problem because we didn't blend in with them because we didn't spend that much time with them. And as I got older and I could go on my own, because I wasn't allowed off the Island until I was in high school. Well you weren't permitted. At that time, you went wherever your parents told you to go, you just didn't go where you wanted to. So until I was old enough to come across the bridge by myself, I couldn't go interact with the people up here. So I didn't have much knowledge of what was going on until I got more into the civil rights type thing. But I never really got into the historical background of the people over here because I wasn't exposed to them. I mean I didn't, I didn't have -- I had maybe one or two friends who lived here whose houses I went to until I started dating. Then I went to my boyfriend's house. But their family wasn't strong into any of the movements or anything. They were really sports minded. That their son was going to get them out of this terrible existence they were ... So that's where kind of like where their focus was. But I wouldn't say I was historically knowledgeable about any of this stuff until I got older. Growing up, we heard about our own family history, some of the Island's history and what was going on nationally. That was her focus. Wherever she was focused, that was usually what we were into. She was

radical in her own way, you know. I mean she believed in all the movements. At the time Malcom X wasn't a real popular person like he is now. And she was one of the few people I knew that would -- You know we could have Malcolm X's stuff in the house. You know she bought -- They had records for Martin Luther King speeches. She'd buy those for us. And if they were coming on TV, we were allowed to stay up and watch it. If she had pamphlets and papers, we were allowed to read them. So that's why we got, I think, so knowledgeable about what was going on at an early age because she was knowledgeable about what was going on. But she didn't have much knowledge of the folks over here because they weren't in her vision, you know. She wasn't tuned into them out all.

MNK: You talked the last time we talked on tape, you mentioned the, that there was a slave block, for example, in the Centre Market.

(279) DB. Yeah, I found that out once I got older. When I started trying to do some research back here -- When I first tried to start to do ... I wanted to do some genealogy things and some research about the whole area. And at that time I found out through the public library -- There was a librarian there, and I think she's now gone, who they had told me had a lot of information about the African-American people in Wheeling particularly. And I never did really get to sit down and talk to her. She told me a little bit. One of the things she told me was that they actually had slave auctions at the Centre Market, where it is now. And I heard somebody who said they were incredulous because I said that. And I'm like, how can you be? Given the era, the location, and the fact that that's usually where they have the slave auctions was at the market house, they were treated like cattle and such like that, it just makes sense that that's where they would have it at. There was handbills. She'd shown me a picture of a handbill that was, you know, told about a slave being auctioned off and that sort of thing. All that stuff is there, you just got to dig for it. I know, matter of fact, I was supposed to go the Wheeling Room this week to see if I could find something on it. I don't know if there is anything in the Wheeling Room yet, but I'm going to go look and see. I know that they had public hangings on 12th Street in Wheeling of African-American people. I don't know why. I

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have never found out the reason, whether it was an impromptu thing or whether they lynched somebody or something. That was told to me by a person who lived here and who was told by their family. I know they had the African-American police and -- Well actually back then they were called the colored police, the colored fire station and all that sort of stuff was located somewhere up Chapline and 12th Street area. And parts of North Wheeling because North Wheeling had a lot of black people living there too. So I don't know a lot of the history about Wheeling. I'm trying to find out now.

MNK: Who would you turn to for, for -- Who would be the people who would know, would be able to talk about the African-American experience in Wheeling?

(312) DB: That's the problem I'm finding now. I can talk to Mrs. Snead if I want to know about Ohio. And there's a few other people I can go to, but as far as the African-American history around here, it seems to be scattered and the people know bits and pieces. I mean Darryl Clausell had gotten some funds to do a gathering of history. There's some at Mt. de Chantal. How it got there, I don't know. And I can't think of her last name, she was married to the ex councilman. I can't think of her name. I'll think of it in a minute. She went to Lincoln School, which was the black school here. There was also St. Martins School, which was also a black school. There's like, my mother knew a lot about that sort of thing as far as the school systems and any publicated things. But her papers are long since gone. Thomas, Ann Thomas, I knew I would think of it. Ann Thomas, who is married to Clyde Thomas, has a lot of information they told me about Lincoln School. Cornelia Shappel, who was instrumental in the Blue Diamond, which is the first predecessor to the YWCA. Actually they helped get the building and all this other sort of thing. When the YWCA was segregated and she has a lot of information about Wheeling far back. I don't know how old she is, but she is definitely a person to talk to for historical things and was very active in women's and African-American movement. Mrs. Thelma Griffith, who, a name I mentioned. Any -- Probably any of

(338) the older people, Shirley Paige, who's the secretary, Jimmy Paige's mother, was active from the '50s, from the '50s on up I think. There's a lot of information, but it's going to take some time to compile it. One of the things I want to do in the Jubilee is actually buy

a building and have there an archives and a permanent place to display the information about not only East Wheeling, I'm talking about the whole African-American experience in the area starting from Ebenezer Zane's slave who saved his life and was given North Wheeling. And how did it happen that her family no longer had the area and that kind of stuff. It's interesting for the kids to know, and the adults, what happened. Why did he give her that property, why was it taken away from her, if it was taken away. You know, what happened, why people were moved from one area to another. I'm talking about the African-American community. Why were they moved off of Chapline Street when they had businesses and homes and everything and put in places that weren't conducive to communities, let's put it that way. And then why when they started to do things in the city like the Victorian homes and that, why then those folks were put out of those homes, that they were again pushed into and those homes were redone and then the African people were pushed out of that area because it was needed for urban renewal again, you know. I mean that kind of stuff, it would be nice to have a place to have that all the time. I mean notwithstanding this place, we need a place that's in East Wheeling community which, because that's where the African-American community is now. That they can go there and see this is what happened then. Well, we are a part of Wheeling's history. I mean that's my next goal for the African-American Jubilee, is to actually get a building and do that. Then when something like this came about, you would have a place to go and find out about that, you know what I mean. But I know there's information out there. I can't think of the sister's name from Mt. de Chantal, but she has compiled some of the information.

MNK: Sister JoAnn?

(373) DB: I think so. She has some of the things that Darryl had gathered up. But here's Darryl's problem, there's nowhere to store them or display them. So he's storing some of the information at Mt. de Chantal. So you know, I mean there's people like -- But Miss Thelma's a really good example. She has photographs and clippings and things like that. Virginia Mosby, who's Mrs. Mosby's daughter, she taught at Lincoln School. And Lincoln School, I believe, would not integrate. They decided to do away with the school instead of

integrating the school. Now that's not -- I'm not 100 percent positive about that, but that's something she could tell you. I'm sure somebody can tell you why they did that. I know that she has a lot of information on paper and photographs and all,
(387) but I've asked them for their information. It's all in storage, but that's not to say it can't be gotten out. Any of the older people that you, if they could trust you enough to talk to you, could tell you 100 times more than I can because I wasn't born and raised here, you know. That's the problem. I could tell you more if I knew more, but I just don't know.

MNK: Most of the people you mentioned are women, are there, are there older gentlemen?

(393) DB: You know I don't know too -- That's the thing about the African-American community, you find that the women are usually at the forefront of anything that's going on. That's just typical. I think that's the way it was even in Africa. The men, the men always would sit around and talk and tell stories and they'd hunt or something. But the principle work has always been done by the women in our society. And still that way today. One of the problems we have around here is that we can't get the men motivated to do things. But while we do have men that are active like Jimmy Paige and Deion Jones, who's the only black trooper in the state of West Virginia. But our men -- I know there are men here who could tell you a lot of stuff. Mr. Ted Walters and Barb and Ted Walters have been real instrumental in what goes on in this area. Raised their kids, they're all professional people, lawyers and maybe one doctor and a news anchor. I'm
(413) trying to think. Most of our ministers are gone. The ones who were here when I was younger, Reverend Lee Wright, I don't know where he's at. He was here back during that turbulent time of the '60s and '70s. His son is in Maryland now. You could ask Mrs. Paige about where the Reverend is. He might have some input.

CNK: His name again?

(419) DB: Reverend Lee Wright, Sr. His son's a minister too, W-R-I-G-H-T. Mrs. Paige, he's married to her daughter. So she would know if he's -- No, his son is married to her daughter. She would know if -- I don't even know if Reverend Wright is still alive. He was real active back then, and he was considered a radical minister. It's real hard to think of the fellows who've been -- Again, maybe you need to ask Mrs. Paige because

that would be her contemporaries, it would be the people her age. Lot of the people who could help you are gone, are dead or when urban renewal took out the homes, they left. A lot of the movers and shakers are gone. So that's the hard part.

CNK: Can I ask a ... question?

(432) DB: Sure.

CNK: What brought you back to Wheeling?

(447) DB: My mother got ill. I would never have come home. I never liked Wheeling. Even -- We moved here because my mother wanted to, and even though I lived here most of my life, I've never really liked Wheeling. I never liked the attitude of the people. It's real prejudicial. It's hard to exist here as an African-American person. You have to be a really strong person anyway when you have economic problems and all that sort of thing. But when you have all the other stuff thrown on top of it, it's real problematic. And then when you leave and see how really narrow minded the people are here, you don't want to come back. And I came back every year, once a year to visit my mother. And she went blind subsequently because of one of her illnesses. And she regained her sight, but by that time I was more or less stuck here because my husband quit his job when I wasn't there to take care of him. He quit his job, and he came back down here. And we ended up having to stay here. So I'm here under duress as far as I'm concerned. But I make the most of it. You know, if I have to be here, I'm going to try to do what I can to make things better for my kids. This is a very difficult place to live. You can't get a job here. I got a job now at the House of Carpenter. I'm a social worker, and I've worked real hard to get all those things. But when I first moved here, I was the secretary, actually my title was executive secretary to the president of a company. It was a multi-million dollar advertising agency. And I came here, and I couldn't get a job as a receptionist because I was black. And I would go in and all of a sudden the position was filled or you know, it's no longer available or you're over qualified. I finally ended up waiting tables. And that's pretty discouraging when you're making a lot of money and you come back here and you got to wait tables because you're black. And it wasn't very much fun for me, but I did it. And I went to school while I was here, and I waited two years to get a job at the House of

Carpenter. But Reverend Beal is a fair person. Not everybody around here is that way. Some people are, but the majority of the people in the working force -- It's real hard to get a job here. I mean of any kind. My daughter's, the one you just met, has been trying to get a job for a long time and it's like -- She can't get a job, her husband can't get a job. He just got a job the other day because a guy seen him and

(472) said, "Hey we need black people to come apply for these jobs." Well, he went, you know. If that's what they, that's what the -- What did they used to call it, not equal opportunity. Yeah, equal opportunity, that's what that's about, you know what I mean. But the only reason they gave him the job was because he was black. But I'm like -- I said to him, I said, "Hey, whatever it takes to get you working and gets you economically sound, then take it." I don't have a problem with that. But, matter of fact, I'm going to tell a few other people that they're hiring, and they want black people. When people write to me and tell me when they need minorities, they'll write to me. PPG just wrote to me and said we need to hire minorities. But that's misleading because they don't really want to, they just make the effort. Because if they really wanted to, they would. But they don't really hire anybody. They just send out letters to people who complain when they don't hire people. So that's part of the problem too. There's people who have

(487) follow these rules because of government and state regulations. They have to hire minorities, but there are all kinds of ways to get around it. All you have to do is say you can't find any qualified minorities. So that's what they do around here. They're notorious in this city of Wheeling and in this state for not hiring minorities as they're supposed to. The city of Wheeling has two minority employees. And the last one they have is only because of federal pressure to hire a minority. Actually, he's a minority coordinator for their job, CBDG department. But that was brought about because of pressure from the federal. So it's, this has been like ongoing. So there was no reason why I wouldn't want to come here and expose my kids and myself to living here and know that my kids would not be able to work. I already knew this. It's one of the reasons we left, is we couldn't find work. My husband or myself. So we left to go where we could find employment, which is your most important thing. Home ownership is a big

issue now around here. We tried and tried and tried for years to buy a home. I just bought my first home, and I've been here 12 years, 10, 12 years fighting to get a home. You can't even get a home loan here. So you can't get a job, you can't get a home, you know.

(511) You kind of get discouraged and lose hope. So there's no reason -- I do not want to live here, believe me. But it's better for me because I'm active, and I'm out there. You know, I still get discouraged, and I get upset at the way people are treated around here. Like I told you, I had problems with the school board. It was because they had thrown kids out of school. Sixteen African-American kids were put out of school without due process, and nobody said anything. And I found out about it, and I was outraged. I'm like, you have to go through certain channels to expel kids, but nobody's ever been expelled from Ohio County schools in the last six years. But these kids were told, "Don't come back to school. You're a troublemaker, don't come back to school." But I mean that's the kind of thing that was going on, and it's still going on. It's still going on today at Park and all the other schools. And there's problems all over Wheeling, but hopefully things like this will change some of them. I don't know if it will, but that's why I stay here. I could leave, you know. I'm a licensed social worker. I could leave and go to work somewhere

(529) else. And my husband works for UPS, he could go somewhere else, but it's like now we're kind of in this cycle to stay here and try to make things different. But believe me, my kids want to leave, they hate it here too. I try not to say that anymore. That I hate it here because it's kind of rubbing off on them. You know, that they can't stand it here, there's no opportunity for them, there's nobody to date, there's nobody to marry. We get the whole, the whole thing you know. You have to go away from home to find a decent guy to marry, they're all selling drugs or they're all nuts or whatever. So it's kind of a bleak outlook for them, but we're trying to make it better. Hopefully.

MNK: Great.