

## **Wilkes E. Kinney**

### ***Skin Color Didn't Matter***

Wilkes E. Kinney: My name is Wilkes E. Kinney.

Michael Nobel Kline: And could you tell us where we are?

WEK: We're in Wheeling, West Virginia. Do you need the date or anything like that?

MNK: Sure.

WEK: July 19, 1994.

MNK: And we're at?

WEK: 1311 Mills Street here in Wheeling.

MNK: Would you just, in as rambling away as you want to, tell us something about your people and where you were raised?

WEK: Okay. I would be the fifth child and the first son of John Wilkes Kinney and Mary Alene Jones Kinney. My mother, Mary Jones Kinney, was from Moundsville, West Virginia. My father was born in Alabama and moved to Wheeling, West Virginia around 1911. His family is here, he raised his family here. He is one of four boys, Oswald Kinney, who moved to Chicago; Edgar Kinney moved to Chicago; and Bunis Kinney, and they all lived here in Wheeling, West Virginia on Lind Street in East Wheeling, where we lived and where they lived does not exist, the tunnel destroyed that portion of Lind Street. My parents had seven children, my oldest sister, Rose, is an Executive Director for an HMO in Philadelphia, PA; my sister, Elene, is in Chicago, she is a counselor for the Cook County School System; my sister, Helen, is in Chicago and is a teacher of Social Work at the University of Chicago; my sister, Marguerite, teaches at North Carolina Central; myself, I'm a human resource director for Professional Home Health Home Care, St. Gregory Hospice and Murphy Medical Supplies, it's an entity of companies; my brother is Dean of Virginia Union University; and then, my sister, Patty, is a school teacher in Special Education in Huntington, WV, so we're all spread out.

MNK: What an impressive line-up!

WEK: Our family as growing up. Number one, my dad was a disciplinarian, a compassionate disciplinarian, we were active in the Church, he had a strong value system, strong family value system, we did a lot of things as a family. His presence was always felt, there were always interesting stories as we were growing up. He was strong on education. I would laugh sometimes now when I think of some of the things that occurred over the years. When I read the paper about the young men and women standing on the street corners, we were not permitted to do that period. If we were bored or if we were loafing, we had to go cut somebody's grass, wash windows, we had to do something for someone regardless, but we weren't permitted just to loaf. He had a habit of coming in when TV's came out of coming in and unplugging the TV and telling us to read. He was big on history of the country itself, and it was also important to him that

we acknowledge ourself as being a human being. I recall a story, him telling us that when you apply for a job, the first thing you do, you apply for the job as a man, and second you apply for the job as a qualified candidate, and he was very, very sensitive as addressing things as a black first, and not as a man first, and he continued to tell us, "Unless you acknowledge yourself as a man first, then everyone you deal with is just going to deal with you as the ethnic origin first, and not as the man", and so as a result of that our family has basically carried ourself in that manner, the seven of us today are still active in whatever community we're in, we're active in our Church, our community in a variety of ways. There are humorous (054)

stories as I mentioned earlier and I went away from it. Once you start talking, put a mike in front of me, you sort of relax and start talking. But, I remember my dad was educated at West Virginia State College, his graduate work was at WVU and Ohio State. In the summer times there were no jobs, the school teachers were not paid in the summer months, and he worked at Wheeling Downs when it was flat racing, and he had a college degree and he would clean out the stables, wash horses, whatever, but it was an interesting thing that the man who was over them could not read or write and could not add, and my dad had to actually figure up the payroll so the people could get paid, and my dad asked, at that time I don't know who the owner of the track was, you know "Why don't you make me the boss?", and he was told, "Well it wouldn't be right for you as a black man to be over a white man". And, we laughed about that but my dad used that as an educational tool, that even though at times when you acknowledge yourself as a man, there are other people whose ignorance you had to deal with, and in that case you had to address it at that time. But, there were a variety of stories; when we bought the house, a man came to the house with a petition to tell my dad that there were black people moving in and did my dad want to sign the petition to keep them out, and my dad laughed and told him "well I'm the guy that's moving in", and he told my dad, "Well, we didn't mean you, we thought it was somebody else, we didn't know it was you, Mr. Kinney, we thought it was some colored people moving in", but that was the way my dad would carry himself, that many people that actually had prejudices, in dealing with my dad their prejudices were under subjection (077)

you might want to say. Both my mother and my dad got along with the well educated, but they also got along with the neighborhood, what we would consider the wino. I recall there was a lady in our neighborhood who must have been a prostitute, and what was interesting, I needed some change and I went to her house to ask if I could do some work for her, and I remember her getting very angry with me. She took me home, she told my dad, "I did not ask him to come down there, he came on his own", she was very upset, you know, and it was like she had a standard and she knew what our family stood for and things like that but she was upset, and she said, "Now I don't want people to think that I have these young men coming down to the house." I never knew (089)

that she was a prostitute and we all had to address her as "Mrs.", you know, we acknowledged her and we had to say "Yes, mam", "No, mam" to her. This was something that my parents always addressed too, we were always very polite to our parents, we weren't permitted to sass our parents. I recall one time I was a senior in high school and I told my mother "Just a minute, I'll be right with you" and the story behind that— I had a young lady from Philadelphia who came to see me so I was impressed with myself, a little country kid from Wheeling and a girl from Philadelphia. Well, I was banished from the living room, you know, forever at that time. An interesting sidelight, my daughter a few years later was marching on a coffee table that I had my feet on in my mother's house and I was banished from sitting at that coffee table, well, when my daughter was marching on it they had to get pictures of it that I don't know what happened between being a parent and a grandparent, but it was alright to march on it but you couldn't put your feet on it. But, I have fond memories of Wheeling and growing up. I think the fond memories are based upon the family unit, there were seven of us, and one of the first homes we had on Lind Street, I think we had the boys' room, the girls' room, and the adults' room, and that's the way it was. There was three bedrooms, well actually the one room was not a bedroom, it acted as a living room also, and then the couch pulled out. But, no matter what, if we needed something, somehow, someway, my dad found a way. We also had a jar, or whatever, but when we worked you always had to put something in that jar and that jar was for emergency, for food in the house, somebody needed a pair of shoes, you know, whatever it was and I

(114)

do remember one time that a pair of shoes I had had a hole in it and I put cardboard in it and I learned from another guy, he goes, "Boy you are country", he says "that's not what you do", he says "What you do is you take a piece of cardboard and you put black tape around the cardboard, then you put it in the shoe, and that way if someone looks at the bottom of your shoe, they can't tell you have a hole in your shoe unless they're real close". So, I thought, he called me country, I mean, he still had the hole in his shoe but I didn't know how to cover the hole up. My parents, my mother sang in the Wheeling Symphony, the Symphony used to have a choral group under Henry Mazer, and she sang in the Symphony. My mother did mainly housework or housekeeping, and my dad was a school teacher, he taught math, industrial arts, and most of the manual training. He taught at Lincoln School when it was an all black institution. He was also the coach at the school, at Lincoln, when it was all black, and they used to have some very, very good teams that produced on a state-wide level and the young men also to make contributions

(130)

athletically and academically when they left Lincoln School. After the school was integrated, he taught at Clay School, he taught at McKinley, and then he went back to Lincoln School when it became a vocational school and he coached again when the school was a vocational school. When he first retired he was working with the Wheeling Area Training Center for the Handicapped and taught there. My dad has always been an active person, I believe he'll be 85 this Thanksgiving, and I say Thanksgiving because I think it's every four years that his birthday falls on Thanksgiving. Interrupt any time you want to ask a

specific question. My sister, Rose, went to Capital University, Helen in Columbus, Elene went to Bethany College, Edwina went to West Liberty, and got her Master's at the University of Chicago, Marguerite went to West Liberty and got her Master's at Marshall, I went to West Liberty, went down academically, and went back into school and went to St. Paul College. My brother went to Marshall University and Virginia Union in Columbia, and then Patty went to West Liberty College. Again, academics were stressed in our family, as well as having a high standard of integrity, moral values, of people being able to

(152)

count on your word, things like that. The opportunities in Wheeling, my dad used to tell us that you'll have to make your opportunities. He was an optimist also, no matter how bad things got and realistically I don't recall them being real bad, you know, although they probably were. I didn't realize we were as poor as we were because somehow my parents were always doing things that would give the appearance that we were better off than we actually were. I recall one time volunteering to bring ham salad to a picnic at school, and my mother really was upset, but a couple days later I took the ham salad, and I found out later that it was ground up bologna and eggs and relish and mayonnaise that she had mixed together, but at that time ham salad was a fairly expensive item. I remember one year, my brother wanted a police car for Christmas, and a couple years before that I had gotten a fire truck that you could set in. Well, Christmas day there was a police car under the Christmas tree, it was painted white, had a big star on the side of it, it said "City of Wheeling" on the side, you know, and it was maybe a few months later I realized I couldn't find my fire truck from a couple of years earlier. I remember one year, I had a pair of white bucks, white shoes, and I needed a black pair of shoes for something I was in, and that evening I looked and I had a pair of black shoes, and I don't know where they came from, but the next morning I remember my mother scrubbing the shoes and those white bucks were underneath of that, but whatever it was that she put on there, you know. But they improvised, they improvised a great deal, passing down clothes from one to the other, buying clothes larger so that you could keep them longer and passing those down to the other kids. Also, I recall a family by the name of the Gordon family, Louis Gordon and Phoebe Gordon were neighbors, and I

(185)

remember Mr. Gordon getting paid and buying groceries and he brought groceries up to the house, and then my dad said, "Well, I have some things back here", and they seemed to either trade or barter, I don't really think they bartered things, but I just think they shared more, in the 50's and in the earlier 60's, there was more of a trading. Another thing that

(191)

I recall growing up, I was not aware of the racial issues as they seemed to be today, our parents babysitted the neighbor kids, they slept in our beds and vice versa, it's just there was more of a community I believe, most of the men were, I would have to say they worked at Blaw Knox Foundry, they worked in the coal mine, and there were all different cultures, I remember the Penco family, I remember the Ralston family,

and I want to say Varlas, but as I grew up I remember now, at the time, I just knew their names were different but their races were irrelevant at that time and it didn't register to me that the Varlas' was a Greek family, or that the Penco was Italian, you know, the Melanoski's were Polish – I didn't realize it at the time. All I knew was we played ball together, you know played hide-and-seek together and I was not aware at that time of the racial issue being as intense as it appears to be today among the young kids. When we were growing up, again, I'll say that the community shared with each other, there were none of the problems with youth, they didn't appear to be as intense as they are today, although I don't think there were as many, for lack of a better word, dysfunctional families as there may be today, or the types of families then, there was always a strong male figure. The families were, as I recall, I knew very few families that didn't have a father living in the home, very few families where the mother actually worked. I'm not saying that that was the perfect family environment, but I was unaware of very few families where that situation didn't seem to exist. Then, in the early 60's, the neighborhood began to change when they started doing construction for I-70. We moved from East Wheeling to 13th Street, which would still be considered East Wheeling. I've been here most of my life, except for the time when I went away to school, came back to Wheeling and was the Community Relations Director for the City of Wheeling, and then went to the YMCA as it's Program Exec, then to the Ohio Valley Medical Center in it's Personnel Department, and now I'm with this company in it's Personnel Department. I married a young lade from Bridgeport, Ohio, she went to  
(229)

Wheeling Hospital School of Nursing, her family is from the Valley in Bridgeport, Ohio. Carolyn Hibbitt Kinney, she went to Wheeling Hospital School of Nursing, then to West Liberty, then to WVU to get her Master's. She's now back at WVU in Law School. So, she's busy, I do a lot of cooking, but it's a joint effort in that regard. We have a 16– year–old daughter, our daughter is very active in school, plays basketball, this week she's at Church camp, she sings, plays the organ, I'm drawing a blank here.

MNK: Did we hear her sing? She has more than a passing interest in singing. I mean she's a recognized singer isn't she?

WEK: Well, she was just at WVU in May where she won the State Actso Competition and a couple weekends ago she and my wife were in Chicago for the National Championship, I believe she was in the top ten. She didn't win the competition.

MNK: This is someone we want to showcase, this young woman.

CNK: We heard her sing, and we fell in love with her singing.

MNK: We heard her sing, and I would put her on festival stage in this country.

WEK: I'll be glad to share some pictures with you.

MNK: Could we, because you took the story up to the point where the tunnel came under construction, you moved to 13th Street, and I gather that those several blocks of Lind Street that were familiar to you as a child were then destroyed by this. Could you describe those in as much detail, try to somehow recreate that community, talk about who lived there, if there were local stores or businesses, whatever.

WEK: Okay. The grocery store in that area, when I was growing up, was Shafer's Grocery store and it later

became Yak's Grocery Store. There was a bar called Snyder's Bar, and there was a bar called Quinn's, but those bars, they

(260)

were different, I can't explain to you what I mean exactly different, but they would have a Christmas party for the children, they had halloween parties for the children around Halloween. The bars and grocery store – you could charge at the grocery store, I recall that, and payday would come and the store was crowded with people like paying the bill. I remember going to Yak's or Shafer's Grocery and Mr. Shafer saying, "Young Kinney, give this to your dad, and I said, "Well he didn't ask me to get that", and he said, "Just tell him Shafer sent it up", and it may be like ten or twelve potatoes, and a couple times he would say, "Here's some ears of corn, give that to your mom, and tell her I said cut the ends off, but I can't sell them", and we'd take them up to the house, and my mother would cut the ends off and then she would take the corn off the cob and she would either fry it with green peppers and onions, you know, but it was that type of a neighborhood. Again, there was a strong community. If someone died in that neighborhood, the day of the funeral, you could play, but there was like this unofficial day of mourning around the house where the person died. No one told you anything specifically but you sensed it, and in

(284)

those particular days, the Italian Catholics in our neighborhood were more apt to wear black when someone died, I mean, and we knew that either somebody in their family or in their household had died, and that's what the black was. I remember the one lady, she always had on black and I said "Did somebody die in her family?", and I found out, and I was maybe 8, 9 or 10 at that time, and someone had died 20 years before that but she was still in her obligation since she hadn't remarried to wear black, and I – okay – but, things like that, the intermingling of a variety of cultures was common, the ball playing at Baker Street playground. Baker Street Playground is not there, now part of Baker Street is there but the playground itself it gone, it's completely gone. The building that Shafer's Grocery and Yak's Grocery was in is gone, Snyder's, Quinn's.

MNK: Can you describe the Baker Street playground a little.

WEK: All right, the Baker Street playground, the basketball court was also a spray pool. One end was the basketball hoop, and the other end was where they had a pipe coming up and when you turned it on it sprayed and made the cement wet and you ran under that. And there were times that both things

(303)

were going on at the same time, and you had to wipe the ball off on your clothes or whatever you had to dry it off, but that was the Playground, it was dusty, our bases were made out of bricks. One of the fond memories I have, there was a construction company, Byrum Construction Company, that brought a load of dirt over the Playground one day when it was muddy and filled in the holes, and the kids from all around the neighborhood raked it, parents, kids, everything, raked it, smoothed it out, they brought us another load and made a pitcher's mound, you know, so those types of things. There were times we would swim in the

creek, that was the swimming pool, that was not uncommon. There were times that you would cook out at the playground, you know, the kids would have hot dogs and things down there. As I recall growing up there was a lot of good fun, we did not have a lot of toys. There was no Sega Genesis, my brother and I had Hop-a-long Cassidy and Gene Autry guns, is what I remember. My sisters' had a doll baby, you know, they would have doll babies and that was basically it. There were some metal dishes I recall them having. We used to like to go to my grandparents house in

(324)

Moundsville because they had a tricycle and they had a wagon, that little red wagon, and we used to wear the wheels out on that thing.

MNK: That was your mother's mother?

WEK: Yes, and they were in Moundsville. My granddad had a grocery store in Moundsville. I remember, Shafer's and Yak's Grocery store, I remember they would have like potatoes, apples, fresh eggs, corn, outside on the sidewalk in bushel baskets, and you'd see people take things out of the basket and go on home, but you knew they were going to pay for it, you know. You'd see them knock on the window like, and they'd hold up three potatoes or an ear of corn, they'd go home and they'd come back and pay for it later, and the trust among

(337)

the community, I know many times that our back door didn't have a lock on it for as long as I can remember maybe until right before we moved, there was no lock on the back of the door, and remember neighbors who got milk delivered, and the milk truck, I can't think of the name of the milk company, but they had an orange truck with black lettering, and they used to deliver milk, and I remember the one neighbor used to bring milk over when it was down the bottom and say "Yeh, give that to your mom for her baking", you know, and my mother would take the milk. And there was never, "Oh, you don't have to, thank you" they just did it, that type of sharing. Also, Sunday morning you were going to Church, Sunday School, and we'd walk from East Wheeling into Simpson Methodist Church on Eoff Street there in Wheeling, and we'd walk if there was no bus or if we'd miss the bus. It was common practice to walk from East Wheeling into Wheeling to the theaters, to go shopping, if you got shopping in town you carried the bags home. But, everybody was doing that, you know, you weren't the only ones doing that. My daughter was a volunteer last summer at Wheeling Hospital and she went to get a neighbor to drive her over there because she didn't want to take the bus to the hospital. She said, "I can't let them see me getting off the bus". And I'm going "Who's they?", and it was her other friends, you know, "I don't want them to know I ride a bus", but when we were growing up that was common place, you either walked or took a bus.

MNK: There wasn't trolley service over to that part of town?

WEK: There was bus service, but there was no trolley then. I don't really recall the trolleys, you know, I was born in 1945, I don't recall trolleys. If they were there, they were before I recall.

MNK: What was the date of your birthday?

WEK: August 12, 1945. I remember a red and white bus and it was called either, I think it was called Wheeling Rapid Transit, the first was Wheeling Public Service, and then it became Wheeling Rapid Transit, and then they all merged into Cooperative, and then the OVRTA has developed from that. But, yeh, bus was commonplace in that day for everyone, and on Sundays you could see a lot of people from the neighborhood going to church, walking to church, going home afterwards. Also, in that particular time, the Church was the focus of the

(379)

recreational facilities. The Christmas parties, the birthday parties, you know how they rent a lot of halls and things, they were all held basically at your home or at the Church, wedding, wedding receptions. A big wedding I saw one time, there was a bride and bridesmaid, a groom and a best man, and the men had on tuxedos and the bride had on an actual gown, and then the bridesmaid had on like this real nice suit, and we thought that was first class, you know, because that was a big wedding, but the reception was right there at the Church, and they had the little sandwiches. And we used to talk about "When I get married I'm going to have a wedding that big", and now I look at it and boy, you know, but that was impressive in those days. That was a big social affair. The funerals, the weddings – I recall when my grandmother passed, and I don't know the exact year that she passed, but I was in grade school, and I remember

(399)

all these families coming home and also remember all these families staying in the neighbors houses, and people sleeping on floors at the house, at the neighbor's house, and there was food, I mean, there was food almost in every room, and then after the funeral was over, no one really left right away, most people had taken several days off, and I remember looking outside and seeing all these cars, and my brother and I were running around looking at the license plates, and a man came from Chicago and we asked him how long it took him to get here and I remember him telling us it took him 27 hours, and he said "But that's pretty good, he said, "We stayed right around 35–40 miles an hour the whole way", and he said if it wasn't for some of those towns with the traffic lights, and today I think, you know, they went to Chicago a few weeks ago in 8 1/2 hours, and they thought it was long, but that was good time, and they would sleep in the car. Even if they came to a place where they would permit blacks to stay, the issue was that the hotels were not 50 room hotels, many were 10 and 12 room hotels and they were full period, and they would be allowed to stay in the parking lots or in front of the hotel and things like that and sleep, but the funeral I remember it because I'd never seen so many Buicks and these Buicks had these big wire wheels, you know, and they had that Buick emblem on there.

MNK: What year?

WEK: I'm saying either 1953 to 1955, in that general area, and a big heavy door, and the cloth, big thick cloth seats in the back. And, I remember someone saying they were going to sleep in their car that night, and it didn't seem like there was anything wrong. Oh yeh, that's a good idea, it's a

(437)

comfortable seat. And, I remember the individuals who were in the military. I remember how thin they looked, you know, and they had this belt on, this big brown belt, and these big brown shoes, they all looked real thin to me, and they all looked real tall. You know, in a kid's eyes. But that stuck out, and I also remember the one guy jingled when he walked, and I could always tell when he was around, but he was a military individual and he had three big medals that were not like the little ones, but they had these, and they would bounce and hit each other, I don't remember who he was, but he was at the funeral, and he slept in the car, and I remember them fixing one room up at the funeral for a couple who had just been married, and we didn't understand why they got the adults' room, but they got it by themselves, and we're going "This is crazy, all these people here, and those two people in one room", you know, and we're kids, we had no idea what on earth would they need. So we thought that's not fair, you know, and we thought that maybe they were rich, maybe they were part of a royalty family, because, you know, there's no reason with all these people sleeping in cars and floors, that these two people should be in the adults room by themselves. Well I know now, I guess. But I do, I have good memories.

MNK: What Church was the funeral held in?

WEK: The Church was held in Simpson Methodist Church. And I remember a man by the name of Edgar Meeks, Mr. Patton, these two men in particular. Mr. Meeks was a rolly-polly type man, but bit shoulders, and they got under this

(471)

casket, my grandmother's casket, and they were like lifting this, and the casket was on their shoulders, and when they got upstairs, Mr. Meeks had just like beads of sweat rolling off of him to the point that it would drip down and stain his jacket, his suit coat. I actually enjoyed the funeral, I was sorry to hear about the death, but I didn't identify with that grandmother as much as I did with my mother's mother who lived up until the last few years, you know, maybe ten years ago. But I enjoyed the funeral because all of these people, I didn't know I had all these relatives from Chicago.

MNK: Well wasn't that grandmother from Alabama.

WEK: Yes, but she came up here, and there were people from Alabama that came. They were different, the people from Alabama were different, and let me explain. Where we grew up there wasn't really a lingo that was maybe strictly black culture language because we grew up in a neighborhood where there was all different cultures, so we spoke in that manner. The individuals from Alabama, as I recall has a southern, southern sound, and I remember one

(496)

man who had like brownish colored teeth and his eyes were real big and orangish color, and the first time I saw him he scared me, and he used to like to pick you up, you know, and he had big hands. But, he was just a distant relative, I don't know his name, okay. But I remember him distinctly and then individuals who came from the south and their accents. Their accents were very, very pronounced and I'm sure as a child we probably stared at them, you know, 'How did they get in our family, or how did we get into their

family, where did they come from, and their accents were very, very distinct. I also remember, the lady's name was Mrs. Tofer. Mrs. Tofer came up to the house and she gave my dad a hug and she was crying. My dad introduced her to this gentleman from Alabama, and she went to give him a hug and you could tell he was frightened, he was not going to have this white woman hug him. Now, I didn't know that was what the problem was at that time, but my dad like put his hand on his shoulder and said, "It's okay, it's okay, she's a good Christian woman". I remember him saying that, and she gave him a hug, but he wasn't about to hug this woman, you know. And that was the type of neighborhood it was. Also, the thing about not wanting colored people to move in the neighborhood, and when we didn't know they were talking about you moving into the neighborhood, you know, we were part of the neighborhood. I remember a situation, this happened to my daughter at Steenrod, they asked her friend, Jennifer, were there any black children in her class, and Jennifer said "No, I don't think so", and Jennifer's mom said, "Well, Kelly's in your class", and she goes, "Oh, yeh, but there's no black kids in the class, though", and Jennifer's mom didn't tell Jennifer that Kelly was black. She came down and talked to us and said, you know, what should I do, and we said, "Well, tell her Kelly's black", you know. But she said to Jennifer it never registered that Kelly was a black child, she was Kelly, and I think that neighborhood where

(542)

we grew up was that way, you know, that's the Kinneys, that's the Penco's, that's the Varlas's, and that was it. It was a close community. They have today, the Rouse family is one I think of, occasionally I see them and to this day we'll talk about East Wheeling and in particular Lind Street, and there was a section called Tunnel Green, and Tunnel Green is still there, but they used to call it Goosetown, too, but at one time the mayor of the City of Wheeling lived there, I believe the police chief, and if I'm not mistaken, either a fire chief or something, and they use to call Goosetown the Capital of Wheeling. I remember hearing that. Then, a lot of the kids also, the boys played baseball for the East Wheeling Pirates, they were in Boy Scouts. Another thing is, I

(565)

remember Mr. Gordon calling my dad to give his three boys a whipping because he was at work and he couldn't get home, and I think about that today, and I think my dad would be in prison for child abuse for giving another child a whipping, but it was that type of thing. Any of the adults could discipline you, and you hear me say discipline, but my dad never hit us in the face or anything like that, he had a paddle and he hit us on the butt, you know, I remember that. I remember one time calling the police, I don't know if it was my brother or I who called the police because my dad gave us a whipping, and the police officer came and he goes, "Hey Coach Kinney, how you doing?". My mom and dad gave the policeman coffee, you know, we thought hey wait a minute, and he said, "Listen, I've got boys of my own, what you have to do, you have to grab them by the belt buckle and you have to hit them underneath the cheek, and that way you know you hurt them but you don't hurt them", and I never will forget that, and the police left, didn't do anything to my dad, but that was part of the neighborhood. The policemen that used to patrol out there,

there was Mr. Naples, Mr. Minella, Chester Thomas was a black police officer. There was another black police officer that came along whose name was brown, and I don't know what happened to him, but he was a younger officer. Chester Thomas was somewhat older, and his wife was a school teacher at Lincoln School, Winnie Thomas, and she went on to teach at Clay School.

MNK: Well, now, you started school around 1950, didn't you?

WEK: I started school at Lincoln School when it was an all black school.

MNK: So, you grew up in a neighborhood where all these different kids played together, but when it came time to go to school, you didn't go to school with them?

WEK: No, I didn't go to school until maybe the fifth grade we started going to school together when we started going to Clay School. It never registered to me that there was a difference though. The primary reason it didn't register

(609)

is we used to meet after school, like the kids that were going to Clay School, we used to meet at I think it was 14th and Wood Street, and we'd meet there and walk home together, and it didn't dawn on us until they brought about integration that there was a difference. You know, the kids in my neighborhood, it really didn't register, and the parents didn't talk about it, and I do recall that you were not allowed to tell jokes about other peoples races. There was no polish jokes, no jokes about blacks, no jokes about the Greeks or the Italians, because there was all that diversity in that neighborhood, and I feel blessed to have grown up in that type of neighborhood because there were some areas I found out later that were primary Polish or primarily Italian or primarily Black. but the area we grew up in was as diverse as it could be. Quinn's Bar, I remember they sold hot dogs with onions and a sauce and you'd knock on the door and say you want a hot dog, and they's bring you a hot

(637)

dog, but you couldn't go into Quinn's, you know, he wouldn't let you come in, but you could buy the hot dogs and things like that. I remember that Quinn's had the best hot dogs. And then, you know, these home made french fries you have now.

MNK: And that didn't register either, that you couldn't go in?

WEK: Well, it wasn't that I couldn't go in because I was black, it was because I was a kid. Because, I'm trying to think who went in, I think Mr. Brannon went in, but now that I think about it, other blacks couldn't go in. Mr. Brannon could, Mr. Gordon could, but they lived there, but I don't recall any other blacks going in there, and that's interesting, you know.

MNK: What about the movies downtown?

WEK: Okay. There used to be at the Pythian on Chapline Street is where the blacks used to have to go originally or over to Bridgeport or Bellaire, and there you'd have to take a street car, but we didn't go to a lot of movies except on

(660)

Saturday, and the primary reason was the cost, it had nothing to do with whether you could go or not, it was just that it was expensive, and it may have only been five cents, but you multiply that times seven kids, and I do recall getting 24 cans of tomato soup for .37 cents one time. I remember that in my lifetime. I remember my dad giving me .40 and he said go down to Shafer's and get a case of tomato soup, and you walked down and there was this 24 cans for .37 cents, it was in the window, big red letters, you know, and he had a big cardboard Campbell Soup display, and it was 37 cents for 24 cans. Tomato soup was spaghetti sauce, ketchup, it went on your meat loaf, it went over your stuffed peppers, I mean, the tomato soup was a mainstay, and vegetable soup also. It's interesting, we were poor, but my mom and dad always had things that we did together as a family, we always definitely went to church. When we came in we had to justify our report cards, and we weren't permitted to talk

(694)

back to our school teachers. My dad said, "If there's a problem, you tell me, and I'll take care of it, but you get your grades, you go to school". When I was going to St. Paul, I remember my dad told me, "The monies there, if your girlfriend has a baby, the money stops, you get a job. He said I'll visit you in the hospital, I'll visit you in a funeral home, I will not visit you in any jail", and I always remember that, and he said "Your mother will not come to visit you in a jail. If you go to jail that's where you are", and that always stuck in the back of my mind.

(Tape One, Side Two)

WEK: College. I remember that they sent letters to everyone's parents telling them they would not tolerate a disruption to the classes, and that students, be a senior or not, would be expelled, be expelled. And I remember my dad calling and telling me that he was sending me there to get an education. When I was through with my education, I could run for any legislative office I wanted to to get them out of Vietnam. I could vote for people who would get them out of Vietnam. But while I was there I had to address the first thing, is to getting my education. And he was saying it was more important for us to get our education as a black individual than it was for other individuals. That they had the privilege of being able to protest against the war in Vietnam that you didn't at this time. And the, again, even though we were tried to be taught to be a man first, there were several incidences throughout our lives that would bring to our attention that, you know, you were a black culture, and there

(011)

were certain things that you had to do. We tell our daughter today that she cannot get C's, that she had to get B's and A's, okay. And we tell her, unfortunately in our society she has two strikes against her. Unfortunately she's a black female, and those are the two strikes. And that the mere fact that she's black someone already stereotypes her as having a certain amount of limited abilities. And the fact that she's a female that they already think that she's, to a degree, a bimbo because by the virtue of her sex. We teach her that she is not. We are quick to point out to her aunts. We're quick to point her out to her, her mother. And we tell her, you know, "You be prepared. And when you--"Again, when she goes into be, for a job, we tell her first thing to do is be qualified. And then you can complain about the other acts of sexism or

racism. But we do tell her, number one, you know, you be prepared. My daughter--And I don't say this boastfully, my daughter's going to have a rough time

(024)

when it comes to men because, and I'm saying this because of me. She sees me do laundry. She sees me cook. She sees me hold her mother. She sees me encourage her mother. You know, I'm just saying so as a result she's going to, you know, "My dad wouldn't do that," you know. And I, I recall she was talking about one of her friends' boyfriend was hitting her. And I said, "Well, number one, honey, that young lady doesn't respect herself, okay." I said, "Yeah, no man has a right to hit you." And I said, "You're an individual. You have rights, and, you know, you just don't put up with it. And when you're dating, the first time it happens, that's the last date." And I said, "You have to make that decision now." So, you know, so she--I, I tease her because a young man called her one day, and she said, "I am not going to give him the time of day." And I said, "Why, why not? He seems like a nice young man." She goes, "Yeah, but his, at home there was nothing to eat, and," she said, "he said he had to wait till his mother got home to fix something for dinner," you know.

(037)

So I'm going, oh, poor guy, you know! But anyway, I--Other things that have occurred in our lives. I saw my dad cook, see. So that, that was important. My mother did housework, but I want to say that the people she worked for, they, they loved her. When my mother passed in March of '90, the family, the last family that she worked with, the girls, the man that he, she worked for, they came to the funeral and requested to sit with the family. I mean they, they kept in touch after she stopped working for them. The girls would write her. And, you know, it was--When I was trying to get into school, the one man used his influence. And, and I prefer not to use his name, but he was president of one of the stores, large stores. And he used his influence to see that I got an interview for the school. And, again, there have been act of, acts of kindness to my parents, and as a result that the kids benefit over the years. There was a store in town called Superiors on Main Street. And when I graduated from high school, I was in the band and all the men in the band were wearing

(052)

black suits. And what I, I didn't know what I was going to do. And my mother said, "Well, you're going to wear the suit you have. It's a brown suit, and you're going to be just as, look just as nice as anyone else up there." And so I really didn't feel bad, but about twenty after five there was a knock on the door. And it was the owner of Superiors, and he brought a suit by. And he said, "I heard you talking about your son needing a suit, so," you know, "let him wear that tonight. Tell him not to get it messed up, and you bring it back in the morning." And I wore a suit from the store. And they took it back the, the next day. But I just remember those types of things over and over again. I remember picking blackberries. And then after bringing the blackberries home, you know, you think, hey, we'll have, mother will fix some jam. She would take that around the neighborhood. And she'd come back, she'd have maybe a pail or so of blackberries. But she'd also come back with potatoes,

(065)

corn, and--But no one asked, you know. Like we wouldn't ask you, well, if I give you this, will you give me that. It was like, well, wait here a minute, you know. Then they'd bring something back, you know. And everybody was rich and poor at the same time, you know. And Mr. Pinko one time came home and he told my dad, he said, "You know, I got a holiday pay," and he said, "so I want to buy a bird." And I had no idea what he was talking about. And he said, "So tell the missus." And that was a common word, I do remember, tell the missus to come up, you know, Thanksgiving. And this holiday pay, that I found out later the holiday pay was sixteen dollars, you know. But then--Now that I look back, turkey was eleven cents a pound, you know, so they got a substantial, substantial turkey! And they went up and got meat, you know, for everyone. And then mother may have taken cornbread to that family. And that was the big thing. There were people with jobs, but I don't know that, that anyone

(078)

was any more rich or any more poor than the other one because they all seemed to share in things together. Another one was the Tofer family, now that was a white family, but there were boys, Eddie and Bobby and Jackie. And I thought they were rough, you know. But when I look at it, things today, these boys were, they were mild. But they seemed to get in trouble. I remember somebody threw a ball and it broke a window and the police came. Well, I mean that was a major crime, someone broke a window with a baseball. And I remember then one of them climbed a telephone pole all the way up to the, all the way up to the top. And a fire truck came, and then, you know--And this, we thought those were major crimes and, you know, and you'd hear the, the parents talking about, well, this world is just going stark, raving mad! I said heaven forbid that these teenagers would climb a telephone pole, you know! I wish that was all there was today. But that was an, an issue. I also

(093)

remember there was a young lady who was very, very, very, very pretty. And I want to say Tasker, but I don't know if that's it or not. Tasker or Taskerline. She became sick, and she had to move away. And then she came back, and she had a nephew with her, or a cousin with her. And it wasn't for years later we found out that she got pregnant, and, you know, went to live with an aunt or uncle and came back. And for years we thought that actually was her, you know, little cousin. And, and I--When we think about that today, nothing would have, that wouldn't even occur. She'd be right there in the same house, whatever, you know. But in those particular days that that was, that was, I guess a disgrace to the family. And they were, they were embarrassed that she'd have a child without a husband, you know. But I always--I laugh now, though, that the father, I guess he stayed in his house and that in, in East Wheeling, you know.

Another thing I remember, that if, if some teenagers, if

(107)

you were dating one of the girls in the neighborhood. Then there was a code of honor that you didn't try to ask that girl out, you know. It was I--These things, I think about it, but there's, there was those unwritten codes of honor that, you know--And I also remember we didn't have gangs in those days. But if you were at a football game or a basketball game and somebody was going to pick on somebody from East Wheeling, you know, you were going to stand up for him even if you hated his guts, you know. And there

was no written rules, there's no books on this, but that's what, exactly what would transpire.

MNK: Did those, did those loyalties develop along racial lines or along community lines?

(116)

WEK: No, community line, you know. And that's what I thought--When I think about it today is it was so unique about that particular neighborhood.

It--Today I think it develops more along racial lines, but in that particular community, it, it was a community. The Gordons were a black family. The Branahms were a black family. We were a black family. But then, you know, we had the Pencoets, the Taylors, the Tofers, the McKinleys. The name was the Hores, H-O-R-E-S. And--But the families in that area, I think, was more of a community row than a racial support mechanism. And it--When we would go to the high schools when the school integrated, I think the same thing still developed. Most of my friends were the Mamulos, the Hercules, the Yockes. And we still walked to school together, walked home and things like that. Also remember there was no schools canceled, I don't recall them, because of snow. And I remember walking to school in the snow, it'd be almost as high as a fireplug. And we would just walk to school. It'd take us longer to get to school, you know, but we had--

MNK: Was that Lincoln you're talking about?

(136)

WEK: Well, that was Lincoln and Clay School. And--

MNK: What are your, what are your memories of, of Lincoln?

WEK: Okay, what I remember of Lincoln School, excuse me, were, was the faculty, to me, always seemed very, very sophisticated. At Lincoln my principal was Mr. Reed. My first grade teacher--Let's see, I had Mrs. Green, I had Mrs. Burke, Illa Williams, Miss Dixon. So it would be four grades. In the fifth grade I went to Clay School. And all the teachers were, always looked very nice to me. They always seemed to be--Today I would say they were overly dressed comparatively. Also was, was aware of--I was reading in a book, maybe the third grade, and I was looking at degrees. And the teachers from Lincoln School seemed to have more of, credentials than the other teachers did in some areas. And I thought, well, I wonder why they're not teaching such and such. But it didn't register to me that it was because they were black schoolteachers.

MNK: Was it exceptional--

(151)

WEK: Yeah, there was an exceptional faculty. And when the schools integrated and they went to other communities, some moved to Columbus, Detroit. They all went into leadership roles in those school systems. And then also I--They used to have a list of people who have done well. And I remember--Well, my uncle for example, before he passed he was working for NATO. He worked for Westinghouse, General Electric, and then NATO.

MNK: He was a graduate of Lincoln?

(157)

WEK: He was a graduate of Lincoln. And computers were never taught in--No one ever really taught him

on computers, but he was just gifted with computers, could figure out programs and things like that. He passed just a couple of years ago. My Uncle Edgar, dad's brother, was in Chicago at the post office. And also a lot of the men in the, in the family have a military background. They went from high school to military to college. And there didn't seem to be any fear of, of going to the military service. I remember Doctor Eugene Jones, which was my mother's brother, he was a captain in the Army. He said he enjoyed his military experience immensely, gave him an opportunity to travel. And he became executive director of Heritage House in Philadelphia, which was a cultural group. And in fact, when I heard you all's name I thought, I wondered if it was a derivative of their company because they did a lot of history and research of the families and communities in the Philadelphia area, or I think it was the Susquehanna River Valley they called

(175)

it. But the people from Lincoln School seemed to do well. When they left Wheeling and went elsewhere they seemed to do extremely well, were in leadership roles. Many of the people who were still here were also making a contribution to the community. I recall the black organizations at that time was the Beau Brummels, I don't know if my parents were in the Beau Brummels. The American Legion, the Elks, they were, are the primary black organizations. But I still think the--

MNK: The ...

(183)

WEK: The Beau Brummels.

MNK: Was?

WEK: Was a, a group of black professionals, I believe how it started out. I don't know if it exists now or not. A person you might be able to talk on that is Doctor Houston Lewis. Have you talked to him yet?

MNK: No.

(186)

WEK: All right, Doctor Houston Lewis lives on 15th Street, okay, in Wheeling. Fifteenth and Wood. He might be able to ... some information on the Beau Brummels.

MNK: What about the black Masons?

(188)

WEK: Okay, the black Masons I'm not real familiar with. See, my dad was not in the Masons. My grandfather was, but I don't remember a lot about the black Masons. I do know they existed. I do know that they were making significant contributions to the community. But my contact with them was very limited.

MNK: Now did you say that your grandfather also taught at Lincoln?

WEK: My dad's father, yes, he taught at Lincoln. And he taught--

MNK: Talk about it. We don't have much of a picture ...

(195)

WEK: Okay. Yes, his name was John William Kinney. My dad was John Wilkes Kinney. I'm Wilkes Eugene. My bother is John William, and he's the younger of the two of us. But I'm trying to see if I can

find a picture for you, but as I--The pictures indicate he had a real thick black hair, real thick mustache. Very handsome couple, very dignified in their appearance. I remember my grandmother more than I do my grandfather. And I actually--My remembrance of him was from the pictures. But I do recall people talking of my grandfather and in a very respectful, reverent type of way. He--I heard them express to him as handsome, sophisticated. And were words that I remember as a young man ...

MNK: ...

(209)

WEK: Yeah, yeah. So handsome and sophisticated. I remember hearing that from people in describing him. And I thought that was interesting. And my grandmother, we called her Mom. And I think we called her Mom because that's what my dad called her. And we called my mother Mother, as to not to get the two confused, I guess. But Mom was avid listener to Art Linkletter, I recall that. She like Arthur Godfrey on the radio. She used to like *Hopalong Cassidy* on the radio and the *Lone Ranger*. There was a soap opera that came on on the radio, and they had an organ playing. I remember her listening to that all the time. And it was almost that you couldn't talk during those, those times. And when television first--When we first got a television, other people got a television before we did. When we got one, she wasn't interested in the television, you know. She still liked her, her radio. *Gangbusters* was her other show. *Gangbusters*. I remember *Dragnet*. And, you know, and she used to talk

(227)

about those shows and those people that starred in those shows as if they were, you know, neighbors also. But we used to go over her house, and it was more fun to listen to radio at her house because she got so intent. And she would talk to the radio, you know. And--

MNK: What do you mean?

(231)

WEK: When I say talk to the radio, if, if like Joe Friday would say, "Just give me the facts, ma'am, that's all." And she would say, "I knew he was going to say that. He says that every week," you know. And it was like she would carry on a conversation, you know, with him. I recall her getting a letter one time from Arthur Godfrey or Art Linkletter. She was the queen. I mean the women in the neighborhood came to see that letter. And I, I remember this big peacock on the top of this paper. Now this, it said NBC, and I guess television was fairly new, but I remember this big peacock on that newspaper. And it seemed like everyone would talk about the peacock. I have no idea where that paper is now. But at the time, you know, it was of no major significance as far as keeping it, but that would be a, a major keepsake now. When she died, I didn't really mourn until, or cry till years later. I bet I probably two or three years. And someone else was living in the house, and she always had flowers on her front porch and they didn't, okay. And she always put a real big wreath on her front door for Christmas, they didn't, you know. And I felt like, you know, I really wasn't real happy.

MNK: ... really gone.

(254)

WEK: Yeah. Um hmm. And that's when it started to bother. And also it, something bothered me in, in a

couple moved into the neighborhood. And this guy had--The police came this one time, several police cars. And I'd never seen all these police cars. And they came with their flashing lights. And he had beaten his wife, and they took her out in an ambulance. The ambulance company was named Burchy's. And the Burchy's Funeral Home. And the ambulance was like a, a goldish color. And I, you know, and I could just remember that goldish, and they're putting her in there. And they, they went away, and they blew the sirens real loud. And they brought him in handcuffs, you know. And I, that night I couldn't sleep because it had just frightened me. And that had never happened in the neighborhood before, anything like that. And they later moved, and I remember people were saying, oh, 'good riddance,' you know, 'they were going to destroy the neighborhood,' you

(269)

know, things like that. And I remember another man that drank a lot in the neighborhood, but we didn't know he drank. And it wasn't until years later--For years I thought he was an ill man. And it was years later that I realized he drank. And I remember one time we called him drunk, and we all got beatings, you know. When I say we all got beatings, on the butt, for calling him a drunk. "That man is Mr. Davis," you know, and that was--So we had to call him Mr. Davis, you know. And I don't know what happened to Mr. Davis. And I don't even know where Mr. Davis lived, but he was in the neighborhood all the time, you know. And he, he may have been one of those homeless people, but you were unaware of it. And I remember going over by Blaw-Knox Foundry, and there was a train that came up that went up between Blaw-Knox Foundry and Byrum Construction, on the peninsula. And there were coal cars. And when they would hit their brakes coal would fall off the coal cars. And many

(284)

people in the neighborhood going over, picking up coals, putting them in little baskets, bringing them home, putting them in their furnaces, things like that, their potbelly stoves. We didn't have a potbelly stove in the house we moved into on Lind Street. The second house, I don't think we had a potbelly stove, we had regular gas. And we thought that was, you know, first class, you know, no potbelly stove. But, but my dad still kept a pot of coffee on the, on the stove, the regular gas stove. And I remember one day trying to take a taste of that stuff. And that was the worse stuff I ever had, you know. But he could drink it just right, and had to have it, you know. ... But other things I recall growing up is, I don't know how old I was there, but I remember there being a fire at Byrum Construction Company on the, on the peninsula. And I'm trying--That, that may be in the late--

MNK: On the peninsula?

(300)

WEK: Yeah. Well, the Blaw-Knox Foundry is on a peninsula. It's like Big Wheeling Creek goes around it, and they call it the peninsula. In fact, there's a Peninsula Cemetery, you know, right next to the Blaw-Knox Foundry. But I remember there was a fire there. And I remember people running over and helping the fire department. But I remember the neighborhood coming out with water, wash cloths for the fire fighters' hands. I, you know, just--It was, it was like they were supposed to do this, you know. And it was just second, you know, nature. I recall one time somebody drowned in the creek on the Fulton side of Big

Wheeling Creek. And all the mothers in particular were trying to find their kids, you know. And they were like in a tizzy going up and down the street, going to the playground, you know. "Have you seen Jeff?" "Have you seen Bobby?" "Have you seen Billy," you know. And it was like they had a role call, and once they got everybody was okay, it was like they all told each other, "No, we're, we're okay here. We're okay here." And then they said, "Oh, lord

(317)

bless the family that has lost their child," you know. And then they were trying to find out, you know, whose family it was. And then the, the conversation changed, you know, you know, "Why was the boy so silly to go out there and swim in the first place in that part of the creek," you know. And, and we swim in the creek all the time, but we swim in a different part, see, I guess. But the part he was swimming in, that wasn't wise to sleep in, sleep in, or swim in rather. So we, you know, it's--I, I just remember a lot of things. I remember Mr. Branahm was active in the Boy Scouts. And he had a station wagon, and they taught first aid. And he had a stretcher in the back of that station wagon that they would take to the Boy Scout camps and things like that. And it had a siren in it. And he used to blow the siren for us sometime. And we'd have a little parade in East Wheeling or out on Baker Street for Fourth of July, different days like that. Well he would, you know, blow the

(332)

siren a real long time in the parade. And the parade would consist of nothing, bicycles, wagons, people carrying American flag, things like that, I remember. And this was mid-'60s now, but a guy by the name of Bill Yocke got killed in Vietnam. This may have been '62 or '63. And he was the first kid killed out there in Vietnam. I mean it was, I mean it was--I mean the neighborhood was devastated. And I, I remember the taps. I, I, you know, the neighborhood was just devastated. And they just, they, they pulled together. There was like, you know--And I remember the parents saying, "We got to get out of there because," you know, and they kept saying, "Those people don't want us over there." And I--That's when I heard a racial slur. That's when I heard a racial slur, you know, he says, "To me they're just a transplanted Jap." I remember hearing Bill's dad saying that, Bill Yocke's dad saying that at the graveyard. And he was saying, "We, if we don't get out of there," he said, "we'll bury thousands of our young boys, and they just don't even want us

(349)

over there in the first place," you know. And afterwards I remember there was like a, it was a funeral, but there was more that type of talk, you know. And I got home and, and I found myself talking to my dad about it and my uncle. "Why did he say that about the Japs?" And he says, "Well, he's probably--He was at Pearl Harbor," and things like that. And I was aware of Pearl Harbor, but it really never dawned on me that Japanese people, you know, but he actually--And I recall seeing a young man in the neighborhood who was either Chinese, Japanese, or whatever, it didn't make any difference. I didn't know the difference at that time, you know. And I remember somebody saying, "He's one of the guys that killed Bill Yocke." And I thought, what, you know. And then I thought he's coming around the neighborhood, you know. But he, he wasn't, and he wasn't Japanese or Chinese, he was Filipino, you know. And he, his, his dad is

coming, was going to be working at the Wheeling Clinic or something, you know. And it was just bizarre how,

(364)

as I look back on now, right then we were nurturing a prejudice at that point and didn't realize we were, you know. But it was easy to nurture it at the time because we were all so emotionally involved with Bill Yocke getting killed. Other things I recall, my mother singing in the symphony. It was a big to-do, you know. We would go up to the--The concerts would be held at Oglebay Park, *Music Under the Stars*. And we would all pile into a, this one car, neighbor or somebody had a station wagon. And I know there was more than allowed by law in it because everybody--There were not that many cars, and everybody piled into the car. And we'd pull up there. And it was a Studabaker, had a big round nose on the front of it, and we'd pull up at Oglebay. We'd park next to those Buicks and Cadillacs just as proud, had no idea that, you know, we weren't as well off as they were. We go in and sit down, but enjoy the concert just, you know. And then pile back into that Studabaker and come back to East

(383)

Wheeling and not realize that, you know, that the other people had two in a car and we had, you know, twelve to fourteen in a car, you know! We would do things, like if you went to the drive-in, pop popcorn at home, take Kool-Aid and take it to the drive-in and then set chairs out in front of the car because everyone couldn't see inside the car, you know. It would be hot inside the car, and then you get out there and just have a nice time. And on picnics a lot of times everyone would be just, mainly sandwiches, you know, there was no fried chicken and things like--It was mainly sandwiches and Kool-Aid was the, was the main drink. And a treat for us was having a cola, an actual cola. And I remember R C Cola. I don't really like R C today, but R C Cola was a special treat when, when your dad would bring R C Cola. And they had these wee little cups, and they would put a little bit in each cup for everybody. And you'd savor that, you know, to the very end. That was, that was good stuff, you know! So--

(401)

MNK: Any recordings of your mother?

WEK: Any--Her music?

MNK: Her singing ...

WEK: No, I don't.

MNK: Really.

WEK: No. And we're, we're not making that mistake with our daughter. We're doing a variety of different things.

MNK: Is that where your daughter gets her--

(405)

WEK: My wife also sings very well, yeah. My wife's a beautiful singer. So--And--

MNK: So she gets it from both sides?

WEK: Yeah. And she doesn't get it from--

MNK: ...

WEK: She doesn't get it from me. I can't even sing in the shower! So--

MNK: Do you remember the, the circus ever coming--

WEK: Sure.

MNK: To town or, or--

WEK: We--

MNK: Carnivals, merry-go-rounds.

(411)

WEK: Carnivals, I remember the carnivals more than the circus. The circuses were always on Wheeling Island, and we'd have to walk. And it was normally the Shrine Circus. And we would have to walk over. And we normally took kids from the neighborhood. And, and in those days it wasn't uncommon for teenagers to be responsible for the younger kids in the neighborhood. It was just understood, you know. And, you know, and I don't know why it was understood, but it was. But we would take kids to the circuses, trick or treating. The Market Auditorium used to have roller rinks. And we used to take them to the roller rink. But the carnival that was held out in Fulton Ball Park. And I think J. E. Miller is where Fulton Ball Park is now out in Fulton. There was a carnival. And the carnival would come. And, and the kids would run, watch them set up. You could get jobs over there also at the carnival. Now when I, when I say you could get a job, you could get a job helping them set up or help

(431)

take down. But we were always told you never got in a truck or trailer with anybody from the carnival, and we didn't know why. My dad said, "You just never do it." And then later years we were told that, you know, there was rumored that some kids disappeared at one of the carnivals, you know. Excuse me. So I, I don't know that happening while I was growing up, but we used to look forward to the, the carnivals.

MNK: Do you remember the, the names of the companies at all?

(440)

WEK: Um, no. I--The one I remember now is Bates, but that's a current company. So I don't know if that was a Bates or not. But the paper boys used to get free tickets to the carnivals. The *News Register* and the *Intel* used to give out passes to the carnivals, and you could get on rides. I, I didn't have a paper route, but I would help the boys in the neighborhood when they'd go on vacation and deliver papers. At Yock's or Schaefer's Grocery you could get odd end jobs by going down and--I remember at Schaefer's and Yock's Grocery you could go down--If you watch when the farmers came in, you could go down and you could wash potatoes or husk corn and, you know, get, get ten cents. And, and if you got fifteen cents, you can put that on there, if you get--If you put--If you got fifteen cents, I mean you were, I mean you were, that was a humdinger of a, of, of money, you know. And--Because Yock's used to have five pieces of penny, five pieces of candy for a penny. And you used to

(461)

get these yellow, red coins and little red gummy candy. And there was five of them for a penny, you know. So fifteen cents, boy, you can make a, be friends with a lot of people in the neighborhood for days. Another thing we--You could always--... had brick sidewalks. And you had to dig up the grass out

between the sidewalks. And you could make money doing that. You could turn pop bottles in. And there was a junk yard, a salvage yard out there in, on the peninsula, and you could turn old rags in. And they used to like, I don't know what, what significance was, but they used to like green clothes. Anything that was green this junk yard, they would weigh it, and they would give you money for the green clothes. But I also remember though when you made money, I don't care what it was for, you had to put something in that jar, you know, whatever it was. Then if we needed something, you know, we'd go to the jar and see how much was in the jar. And I remember as a kid saying, "I'm going to have those jars all around the house, you know, when I grow up.

(480)

Well, you know, I don't have them all around the house! But it just--At that time it seemed like that jar was never empty, you know. It was whenever you need something specific, there was money in that jar, you know, for whatever we actually needed. Growing up, my sister ... the oldest, she graduated from Lincoln, so she didn't go to an integrated school. She had her most contact at an integrated school at Capital University in Columbus. And it was a big achievement because she graduated from Capital University and got a bachelor's degree in nursing. And that was a rarity for any cultural, and for this little black hick from Wheeling, West Virginia, to get a bachelor's degree--When she came back she started working at Ohio Valley Hospital. And--But then she went on to Philadelphia and worked at Temple University, their hospital there. I'm starting to loose words, but let me run through the family, Elene is married and is in Chicago. She went to Bethany. At the time I

(502)

believe she was the only black student at Bethany. Helen Edwinna, she, Kinney, she's in Chicago, social service department at there. She went to West Liberty, was active in the drama and theater at West Liberty and then went on to Chicago, there got her master's in Chicago. Marguerite--

MNK: In drama?

(510)

WEK: No, in social science, okay. M.S.W., but with a, earmarking education because she was teaching at the school there. Marguerite, West Liberty education, drama, went on to Marshall. And her husband now is a school principal, and they're in South Point, Virginia. Now he, they were originally in Rocky Mountain, North Carolina, and she was teaching at North Carolina Central, but he, he just got a principalship in South Point. Then myself, then my brother who's dean of School of Theology at Virginia Union. Then my sister Patty who went to West Liberty and is now going to Marshall for her master's, teaches there in Huntington. The other thing is, our family, we just had our family reunion. My Uncle Lawrence, dean of Howard University in Washington, DC. Aunt Helen, schoolteacher in Toledo, that's my mother's sister. Her husband has, had before he, he just recently retired, established a dental clinic in Toledo, Ohio. Her, my mother's brother, Doctor Eugene ..., was in the music department and theater department at Temple University. And, you know, these were all from right here in Moundsville and, and Wheeling.

MNK: East Wheeling.

(539)

WEK: East Wheeling, right. The young man that my uncle raised, Tim Munson, a few years ago they were talking about the prejudices in the FBI. Well, he was made director of the North Carolina-South Carolina FBI region, you know. And so--And we were saying, you know, one ear we're hearing this prejudice, and this young man from the Moundsville-Wheeling area, you know, has been put over the FBI. He's up in the--When I say over, over a particular region. I think he's up in Valley Forge, PA, now. My--I can't name every one and--My cousin is the, was the attorney general for New York state. And that's Doctor Lawrence Jones' daughter, she's now working for the Ford Foundation as their chief of legal counsel. I have a cousin, Ben, who is Senator Ben Espy from the state of Ohio. He was vice mayor of Columbus. When you, when you look at it, we're, I don't say this boastfully, but in reality we're not a stereotypical black American family. Number one, I'm not aware of anyone in the, of the fifty-

(565)

four people that were at our family reunion, I'm not aware of anyone who is on any type of welfare assistance program, okay. Now I'm not saying that that's automatically makes you a, a black's the only one that can be on a welfare system. But when I was laid off from YMCA I worked part time for Criswell Security, Airport Limousine, part time for WTRF. I would not not work. I would work. I would do, do something, and that was with a college education. I would not not do something. And even if it meant someone would, say drive a cab or do security work, you know. And it was, ironically it was during the security work at WTRF TV that I came in contact with a man who put me in contact with the executive of the hospital when I got the job there. So--But there were a variety of academic backgrounds. There are a variety of professions. I have an, a new nephew-in-law to be, he's applied to the FBI, and we think he's going to, you know, get in there. When I say the nontraditional,

(590)

a lot of them have nontraditional jobs or jobs that blacks don't seem to focus to. Carolyn's brother is out in Nevada, and he's working for the Granger Corporation. And that's farm equipment, heavy. And the majority of his customers are going to be rural, country farming, white American. And he's a black young man and is doing superb at his job, you know! So I--We tell him it's his novelty, you know, of who he is. I--There was something I mentioned to another girl the other day, I mean a moment ago and I want to go back. I was talking to a young lady from East Wheeling. And she reminded me of this, how when they started tearing down the homes that we lived in, that the people, we had already been moved out, would come back and watch them as they tore down the houses. And you'd see them, some of them get tears in their eyes when they tore the house down. And there was Miss Hawkins, who was in her nineties, and her husband. When they moved, they've always had a house

(617)

all their years. And they had always had a house. And they had to move up to Lincoln Homes. And it, shortly thereafter they both died. And they were in, you know--It--For the most part they were in good health. They walked with, both of them walked with two canes, but shortly after they were displaced they died. A lot of the people in, and I'd say in a, in like a five to ten year period that lived out there were, were

just gone. And mentally I felt like had they not been displaced, many of those older people would still be alive. But that, the tunnel had a, to me, had a negative impact on that particular community. That community was as close to utopia as I think you could have gotten. I mean there was all these different cultures, religious people, different religious groups, Catholics, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, you know. And then there was a Greek Orthodox family. And I remember their Christmas was different than ours. And we didn't know any better so we celebrated theirs

(643)

too, you know! So--And mainly the celebrations in those days, Christmas time were clothes. You know, there were not a lot of toys given. A lot of them were clothes for obvious reasons. They were the practical aspect of it. The entertainment was normally the community getting together, someone telling jokes, things like that. But again, the jokes were jokes that the adults could tell and the kids could listen. The kids could tell and the adults could listen. It was not the malicious jokes, you know. I--Jeffrey Dahmer jokes probably wouldn't have been told or even now the O. J. jokes probably wouldn't be told in that community. And there was--And it was, it was hard core as far as there were no jokes about anybody's race, ethnic or, or religion, not at all. And another thing I remember was there was one family that a priest would come by and see. The lady was ill, and they would give communion. But it was like the other Catholics in the neighborhood, when that priest came, would want to

(670)

come out and, like shake his hand or touch him, you know. And I don't know--Just--Again, that was their getting close to God or whatever, or they felt like that was a privilege to be able to touch the priest. And, you know, we used to, you know, I don't know why but we would almost like bow when he'd go by, you know. But I remember that. I also remember the basketball games with no lights on the playground and still playing the game. And also I remember your parents whistling or calling you, and, you know, and you could hear it. And, you know, you'd be playing basketball and you'd hear one guy, "Oh, my mom's calling me. I got to go." "We didn't hear anything." But he knew. He heard his mom, he left, you know. And, and having chores. I remember having a specific list of chores to do, and whether you were going to band practice, football practice, whatever, made no difference. You had to do those chores first. If you got to band practice late, "Why are you late?" "Well, my dad said--" "Well, never mind, that's okay." You had chores, you didn't do

(696)

them. It was like the band parents, I mean the band director even understood, you know. If you had a chore, you had a responsibility. I graduated in '64 from high school, and I, I was in the band. My brother played football. I was athletic, but I liked music better. So you couldn't do two to any degree at that time. But I remember the, the long band practices, walking to the football games on a Friday night, and after the game walking home from Wheeling Island to East Wheeling, you know. There was--And there was no school bus, you carried your instrument, you know. And you took it back to the high school, the janitor would let you in. You put it up, you dried it off, you know. I--And I think about it. And getting home at twelve, twelve-thirty in the morning and, and there was no--

(Tape Two, Side One)

WEK: See, I really don't know. Yeah. Another lady you may want to talk to is Eva Peters. Eva Peters lives on 14th Street in Wheeling. She lived up in, it was called Vineyard Hills then, but she lived in a house.

CNK: So these people have been contemporaries of yours?

WEK: They would have been--

MNK: A generation ...

(006)

WEK: Yeah, they'd been my dad's generation. Cornelious Shappel.

CNK: Yeah--

WEK: You--Okay.

CNK: We met her.

WEK: All right.

CNK: We need to interview her.

WEK: Now, Tony and Charles Gordon, they're, they're probably ten, fifteen years, they may be in their fifties, late fifties rather than--But Eva, Eva Peters is probably in her--She's probably the same age as my dad, but still drives, you know.

MNK: What were your own feelings about seeing this community destroyed? You, you've talked about--

(013)

WEK: I, I was angry. I mean I was real angry. When I moved, we moved--

MNK: Could you back up and say what you were angry about?

WEK: Okay. I was angry about them tearing the houses down. Number one, I didn't see a need for a tunnel, you know, but I was younger. I was a sophomore in high school. My friends lived out there. The young men that I played with, grew up with lived there. Some of them had already moved. And some had moved to Wheeling Island. Some actually moved to Ohio. You know, one moved to Bridgeport, Ohio, with his aunt or uncle. And, and as a result, you know, we were, we were, the neighborhood was being, you know, just broken up. There was like a security factor. There were racial problems that you read about and saw on the TV in the '60s. But it was like when we came home, it didn't directly impact us to that degree. Because you'd go, you'd walk down to Baker Street playground and there was all these groups playing basketball, baseball,

(027)

softball. If there was interracial dating, I don't even know, you know. But I do know that I, that breaking up the neighborhood, the young girls that I had grown up with, they were gone, you know. And you were able to walk home with them and, and not think anything of it. I--The neighborhood was just--The grocery store. When we moved up to 13th Street the nearest grocery store was Ford's Market, and it was down on Eoff Street, 13th and Eoff, across from Saint Joseph's. But his store was real, what's the word I'm looking for, real, real clean. I mean he had the linoleum, tile floor. He had these bright, silver shelves. Yock's and Schaefer's, they had wooden shelves, they had wooden floors. It smelled like a grocery store, you know.

Mrs. Schaefer would bake bread and sell it, you know, and so--I mean everything at--Ford's Market had everything you'd want. I mean there's not, you know--But it wasn't the same. I mean everything was just, it was just too clean to be a grocery store, you

(042)

know! Schaefer's, you'd go down, you'd want a sandwich at lunch. You know, you could buy a sandwich there. And you'd buy a sandwich, and it would be like a bologna sandwich, like two or three slices of bologna and a slice of tomato and mayonnaise and bread. And it would just be oozing, you know. And it would be twenty cents. And a sandwich at Ford's Market was sixty cents, and there'd be one slice of bologna on there, you know. And you just, you just wanted to say, you just, you know, maybe two slices if you were lucky. But it was, you know, it was a nice grocery store. I liked the Fords. But you also knew that you couldn't charge at Ford's, you know. You, you couldn't charge anything at Ford's. Schaefer's, if you were coming from, back from the playground and you were sweating, you knock on the the window and say--And there was a pop out in a big tub in front of Yock's, in ice. And you could reach in, get it, take the lid off of it, you know, and you could wave, you know,

(054)

and hold it up and he'd, he'd know you got it. You couldn't do that at Ford's. You couldn't reach in that refrigerator and get it and just wave it and leave, you know. I, I remember, I can't think of this lady's name, but there was an elderly lady. I want to say Pratt, but there was an elderly lady that used to live kind of across the street from us. But she was very, very unclean, you know. She didn't smell fresh, and she looked dirty all the time. But she had a garden, and she would bring that food over to the house, those tomatoes and those potatoes. And my mom and dad would take that stuff just as gracious, go in and wash it, and we would eat it. And it's, "I'm not eating that stuff," but we would. And it would just--But that was the neighborhood. And we had to call her Mrs. Pratt, I remember that. We weren't allowed to get smart with her, anything, you know. And, and I don't know if these people had Social Security or what, but everyone seemed to make it. And there was more of a take-care-of-each-

(069)

other type of atmosphere. She died in the house. And I remember the ladies going to her house. And I remember them, the people coming, bringing her out, the undertaker, you know. But I remember the ladies in the neighborhood taking buckets and rags and scrub brushes, you know. They brought her back to the house, and she was out in the house. Her body was out in the house. But I guess they cleaned the house up before the people were allowed in to see it and things like that. And I don't know who her family was, don't remember people. And I remember they didn't go to the graveyard, they came and got the body. And--But we didn't go to the graveyard, which was different because when my grandmother, my dad's mother died, there was a graveyard. We went to the graveyard and there was all these cars and things like that. That didn't happen at, for her, you know. And it was a--You know, I don't know, a very brownish color. I can't explain it. But everything seemed just like brown.

(084)

And her house was brown, and that's--The funeral was they came and got her and took her away. And that

was it. And there was no, lot of--There was not a lot of food afterwards and people standing around and conversing and things like that. People just got up and left, more or less, when they came and got the body.

MNK: But it sounds as though it was done with dignity.

(088)

WEK: Oh, yeah, yeah. Yeah, but there didn't seem to be any family around. And I--

MNK: When you moved over to 13th Street--

WEK: Um hmm.

MNK: That was all different.

(090)

WEK: That was different. It was an integrated neighborhood. But--And there's friends today, Doc and Chickie Williams, we keep in touch with them. The Glascos, that, they live out in Dimmeydale now. We keep in touch with them. The Bartolovicks, Carolyn and I keep in touch with them. I go back and see Mr. Prime, he still lives on 13th Street. But beyond that, I don't--There--We didn't develop the community as we did out in East Wheeling. So--Yeah, but I do--But there's about three or four of the families that do keep in touch, and, from 13th Street. And they have a reunion, the 13th Street has a reunion at Wheeling Park every other year. The Vilases, they, he owned the Rosebowl Lane, he's deceased. But she lives up the corner here on Jefferson now. I keep in touch with her. But she's from 13th Street.

(103)

MNK: We interviewed her yesterday.

WEK: Vilas?

MNK: ... Greek.

WEK: Greek lady?

MNK: ...

WEK: Yeah.

MNK: Angie.

WEK: Angie?

MNK: ...

WEK: I don't know.

MNK: Well, ...

(106)

WEK: Yeah. Her husband owned the Rosebowl Bowling Lanes on Edgington Lane. Is that the same one?

MNK: I'm not sure. Maybe they were brothers.

WEK: Yeah.

MNK: If you stood on the ground now where your, where your home was--

WEK: Um hmm.

MNK: Would, would it be under pavement or would it be--

(109)

WEK: It would be under grass.

MNK: Under grass.

WEK: Yeah. As you come out of the tunnel going east, if you look to the right it'd be probably about twenty-five yards from there. And it's, it's all grass. It's--What my focal point, there's a big block of rock that's still there. I can recognize that.

MNK: Do you look at that every time you go through the tunnel?

(114)

WEK: Oh, yeah. Yeah. I, I try not to. When I say I try not to, I, I'll say I won't look this time, you know, but I do. Now when I'm coming out I don't necessarily go right, but going west I'll look there. And when I go up to, up Wheeling Hill I always look out there and look out there. Those--I did have, I had fond memories, I, of growing up in East Wheeling. The, the neighborhood, the people I grew up with. And I, I was unaware of all the problems in the world when I was out in East Wheeling. So--

MNK: That's an amazing story. If you stood there now where your house used to be, you would hear the roar of tunnel traffic.

WEK: Um hmm.

MNK: What did you hear in those days?

(124)

WEK: You heard the foundry and the cranes. There was a seven o'clock whistle, a seven-thirty whistle, a three o'clock and a three-thirty whistle. And then there was a six o'clock whistle. And then there was an eleven o'clock at night whistle. And then there was a ten o'clock siren curfew, you know, that came from the foundry. And you could hear, you could hear the steel drop sometimes at night. You could hear a train whistle because Tunnel Green

had--There's a tunnel that, up here that comes--It's a walking path now, I believe. But you could hear the whistle, the train whistle.

MNK: Which train was that?

(132)

WEK: That would be the B & O Railroad. And the B & O Railroad was where the Hazel, where the West Virginia Northern Community College is now is, used to be the B & O Railroad station. And there were trains going to DC, Chicago and New York. I remember those trains particularly. But you could, you could hear the train whistles. You didn't, you didn't hear fire whistles and ambulances in those days like you do today, you know. I think most people that got sick or if they had babies went in, in the car or a cab, you know. I, I do remember a lady who got sick and was going to have a baby. And she went in a cab to the hospital, you know. There was not as many of those type of things, the sirens. And when you heard a siren in those days it seemed like everyone came out of the house to see what was up. But now I know out here if I hear a siren now, I hardly even move, you know, unless I see the light go right past the house, you know. But that's a major difference today, a major difference.

(148)

People out here have cars galore. When I was growing up one or two people, every other house had a car, you know. Then most people took the bus. And you also took the bus even if you had a car because if it

was between paydays it was cheaper to take the bus than it was to put gas in the car. And, you know, things like that. And they'd save the car for Sunday. And I just, I remember things like that. I remember more sitting on the porches reading and talking than there is today. Now we, we still try to sit on the porch, Carolyn and I do, and Kelly, you know. But that's something that seems to have gone by the wayside also. So--

MNK: Could you hear sounds from the river at all?

(159)

WEK: No, we couldn't hear the river or the creek.

MNK: You're too far around the hill?

WEK: Yeah. We couldn't--We used to walk on top of the hill up where the top of Grandview Manor is to watch the fireworks display. We used to walk up. We used to take sandwiches up with us, go up early. But it wasn't as developed. There was no Lincoln Homes at that particular time. And you could sit on the hillside, and you could see fairly clear. I remember when there was three bridges, the Steel Bridge, the Suspension Bridge and the Fort Henry. But there was no tunnel at first, you know, when we lived out in East Wheeling. And there was three bridges. Also, I also remember Veteran's Day and Armistice Day parades. Those parades were big things. People would just go in town, and veterans would be dressed up in their uniforms. And people who were walking with canes that were veterans would put their uniforms on. And it

(171)

was a big, big thing up until the early '60s. And then it started to, you know, with the Vietnam War, wasn't as impressive, you know, all of a sudden--I think the Vietnam War brought how devastating war was, because we started losing people. And Bill Yocke got killed. See, that wasn't supposed to happen, you know. Americans didn't get killed in the war, whatever we thought. But that was right there, you know. And--So--But I, you know, I--Again, I say I enjoyed growing up in East Wheeling.

MNK: Thank you.

(180)

WEK: Oh, you're welcome.

MNK: Carrie, do you have any questions?

CNK: Hmm. No, I don't think so.

MNK: Charlie?

Charlie ??: You talked about swimming in the creek.

WEK: Um hmm.

Charlie ??: What was like that in terms of the--

(184)

WEK: The sewage?

Charlie ??: Clean, ...

WEK Well, the water was--When we first started swimming in there there was no sewage treatment plant, but you could always see the bottom of the creek. It was years later that it started to get a reddish brown

color. And I don't know if that was from mine seepage or what. But they did, in later years, put a sign, you know, 'Danger, no swimming in the creek.' They had a skull and a big danger sign and things like that. It stopped some people, and it didn't stop, you know, didn't stop others. What I remembered also is we--There was no such thing as low-fat, low-calorie diets, you know. You ate exactly what you had available, you know. And that, and that was, that was not an issue. I think about that now. And bacon and eggs and ham were commonplace. Another

(196)

thing I remember, wild greens. And it was not one particular culture did it, but a lot of cultures would pick wild greens from the back of the hillsides, dandelions, and cook them down and things like that.

MNK: Mustard.

(200)

WEK: Yeah, mustard greens. And, and Mr. Pinko would pick dandelions and, and he'd, I'd, you'd hear him ... "almost ready, fellows." And, you know, we're a kid, we had no idea what he was talking about. But I'm sure that was dandelion wine, you know. So, you know--But just remember a lot of things. I also remember the police officers were heroes, you know. We never ran from a police car. We, we always ran toward it, you know. We had no--It was not a concern about the policemen at all as, you know, being arrested, things like that. You know, I remember one time at the playground a policeman drove up and said, "It's time to go home." There must have been thirty kids there, and every one of us left when one guy said it's time to go, you know. Just, "All right, yes, sir," and that was it, you know. So things, things have changed and not necessarily for the better. There are more academic opportunities. There

(211)

are more, more job opportunities for young people. But I think we lost some of the legacy as far as the neighborhoods and the family traditions and the cultures, things like that. We try to have a family dinner here, you know. And like we haven't eaten yet, but we'll sit down and eat and talk, you know. And I, I think that's important. My daughter is so busy. She's in the choral group. She plays basketball, you know. She's on student council, so--And then my wife's in school. So we have to just take the time and set time to do some of these things. So--Yeah.

(220)

MNK: Thank you.