

FRANK ANGELO

I was born on Hunt Street, about three blocks east of the famous Hunt Street Police Station. My recollection of those early days is very dim. My first recollection is going to Pingree School which was on McClellan. That's where I started kindergarten in Detroit. One of the things I remember, and I guess it's true today, every school always had a confectionery store across the street from it.

I remember one incident. My grandmother came over from Italy for a short time. She was a fairly large, stocky woman and wore a dress that had great big pockets. She had, literally, almost a pocket full of Italian coins. They were parts of a lire; but they looked like dimes, nickels and quarters. Grandma gave my oldest sister, Frances and me a handful of these coins. We were about five or six years old. We went to the confectionery store, and we thought we were in heaven. We had all this money, and we could spend it. There were other kids milling around and, my God, we got candy. At that moment the storekeeper didn't realize he was getting Italian money, but he obviously spotted it that night, and oh, did he chew us out the next day I'm telling you.

I was probably about 7 or 8 years old, which would make it about 1922, when Detroit was just beginning to explode. In terms of population, it was a million then. One of the major explosions in growth was on the east side particularly the area around Joseph Campau and Davison. Those were the two important cross streets and the Baker Streetcar Line which was a major lifeline of Detroit. It began at Davison and Joseph Campau. Then it ran down Joseph Campau through Hamtramck, picked up Chene and came down to Gratiot. Then from Gratiot it crossed onto Michigan and wound up at the Ford Rouge Plant.

We moved to Shields, between Davison and Six Mile Road. I went to Northeastern High School. We took what amounted to a Toonerville Trolley type of car from where I lived to Davison and Joseph Campau. We changed there and picked up the Baker streetcar. I'd have to leave quite early in the morning. You'd get on that Baker Streetcar, and the odors of the Ford Motor Company working man were all over the place.

There were some Black children at Northeastern. I didn't realize it until I was looking at the graduation picture a couple years ago, but all the Black children were clustered in one corner.

I was graduated in June, 1930, which was sort of the official start of the depression. But what people don't understand is that the so-called big depression had started in Detroit about two years before when the Ford Motor Company shut down all its plants to end the production of the Model T.

The neighborhoods on the east side, until the late 30's and 40's, were very distinct. You had your Polish area. Out where we lived

on Shields was a mixture of Italian, a lot of Polish. They had spread out from Hantramck. The North Detroit area boasted a lot of Italians, and if you went out Gratiot, around Harper, there were a lot of Italians. Below Gratiot and McDougall you were all Italian. Beyond that it was mostly German. As you went further east, you began to run into the Belgians.

At that time there was a Black community. It was downtown on the east side and was very distinct. It was locked in there, and gradually began to move north on Brush Street then St. Antoine and Hastings. As the Jewish community moved north, the Black community expanded behind it. When the Jewish community hit the Boulevard, that was it. They didn't cross the Boulevard directly, and so they leapfrogged and went from the east side at the Boulevard to Dexter, 12th and 14th. It was just understood that if you were Jewish, you didn't move into a WASP area which it was at that time. The historical path is clear, and the Blacks followed the Jewish people up the St. Antoine route to the Boulevard; and they, too, leapfrogged and took over the 12th, 14th and Dexter Boulevard area.

One of the absolutely great untold stories in this country is the greatest migration of people that's ever happened anywhere. It gained momentum in the 50's, particularly right after the war. And it brought millions of Blacks from the South. They were fleeing since the intensity of attacks in the South was increasing. Take a city like Detroit where the population ratio was maybe 15 to 20 percent Black, but a Black community that had roots. In the next two decades large numbers of Blacks came into a community which was not prepared to absorb this huge inflow. Many of the people who came were poor, with little education. The massive numbers really shook the city up, and at that point Whites began to say, "My God, were being engulfed....I'm going to get out of here." At the same time expressways opened up, making it very easy for people to get out. And with FHA the government was making it easy to build new housing wherever you wanted it. The White population was the only part of the population that was able to take advantage of that because Blacks in most cases didn't have the money or were blocked by racial attitudes.

