(INTERVIEW WITH MANLOVE & HUNTER)
(VERSION 2.0 REVISED JULY 1992)

1948? -57.

E.MANLOVE: The first part of the project that was built was on Benton and Erskine. Then later on, we lived on Watson. We didn't get in when it was first built because that was when my father was living, and he didn't want to move down there. Shiloh was right in there -- Mack and Wilkens. It was built a little different. The floors were cement, and they just left the bare cement showing. The whole place was cement, the walls, the floors. They were sort of like a gray. You had to have rugs.

GLORIA HUNTER: St. Peter Claver was on Beaubien and Eliot on the south side, and then as you go back I think there was just the center, and then there was Louie's. Louie was an ex-Navy man. After Louie's there was Mr. Dotty's grocery store where mother ran a tab for years and years. It was like in the middle ages, with the wooden counter and the pot-bellied stove and the peanuts. They lived behind the store. Mr. Dotty was black and so was Louie. Naturally Mr. Dotty and his wife and daughters, they were upper-crust. Their father owned the store.

It was horrible when you think about it now. I remember the food would be spoiled. By the end of the month, the hot sausages would be like little knots, but you bought it anyway. He didn't put any more out until he sold the last one. I don't think he'd ever stock the shelves because he would buy 10 of everything until it was gone. As we got older and we moved down on Eliot between Hastings and St. Antoine, we were

about seven or eight, it was easier for us to go to the store and mother would give us this note saying what she wanted. I would alter the note. She would put down potato chips and I would put down four bags. I loved windmill cookies, and she'd put down two, and I'd change it to a 12. I could do her handwriting better than she could. I'd make her give me a long piece of paper so I had plenty of room to put down the rest of what I wanted. I would eat all the potato chips and so on.

Now, you remember Jack's right there on the corner of Hastings and Eliot? Jack's Drug Store is where you guys would go and put in your numbers. I remember because Miss May would send me up there. He was a white man. I remember the floors were tiled, and that's when they still had the fountains and the bar stools and they sat so high. And then there was a little grocery store, and then a restaurant, and then the alley where the prostitutes hung out. They would pay us a quarter to watch for the police. When Shorty Black would come, you'd holler. We thought it was fun. We didn't realize there was anything bad.

E.MANLOVE: We used to go to the Castle Show. You'd go there and there'd be so many people, and everybody would be talking out loud and everything, but you all looked forward to that. You'd get your plates. You'd get a whole set of plates. This was after the war.

GLORIA HUNTER: You got a plate and you'd get the bowl. Some

people would get their whole set of dishes from there. On Saturday from 12 pm to 6 pm it was kids there. From 6 pm on it was for the adults. Some tried to double back and get two plates. It was the flowered stuff. For the poor, it was your finest china. You'd get the bowl, the salad bowl and saucers.

We lived on the third floor and right up over our apartment was the roof, which we made our private domain. We had our club up there. The roof was a world in its own. You traveled by roof. In the three-story apartment buildings the kids knew we could travel all through the court by roof, because if you went in somebody else's court, you could get beat up. That was enemy territory. You jumped from one roof to another. Mom didn't know. Kids had a world of their own. We would climb around the walls. Sometimes if she wasn't home, we could monkey climb from the first floor all the way up to the third floor and get the window open and come in the apartment. Sometimes, we had to almost do it for survival. If we stayed out on the weekends until it was dark, the prostitutes and the pimps would be pulling the Murphy on the white man. These men would tell white men that would come into the area that there were prostitutes in these apartments, and they would take the money. The guy would say, "OK, you give me $25, and you go up to apartment 675 and in that apartment there's a woman there for sex." When these white men would get there sometimes they would be drunk or they would be angry. And the doors were steel so the men would be

hollering and beating on the door. They would try to set a fire; they tried to burn the place.

Whoever thought that using cement and steel wasn't a bad idea was correct because when Mom and her neighbors would finish with the paper, they'd put it outside the door. We kids would collect it for sale, or the papers went to the incinerator. These guys got together one night, and they decided they were going to burn the door down to get to this woman, and had it been wood, it would have burned. But since the whole building was brick and steel, it wouldn't even burn. They would try to kick the door down or take the handles off the door.

The kids had a signal. When we would go to the Castle and stay past 6 pm to see Buster Crab and Flash Gordon, you'd catch some grown-up coming into the movie, and you'd walk next to them so the usher would think he was your parent, and then you'd stay in there or you'd crawl up under the seat. When you'd come out, it would be after 6 pm and it would be dark. Sometimes when we got home the lights would be off in the hall. If a light was out, you didn't know if one of the junkies had screwed the light bulb out because he was out there shooting up. You didn't know if it was a prostitute turning tricks in the hall. You didn't know if it was a set-up. So you would stand there and holler, "Hey, Ma." She would come to the window and tell us to come in the building or not to come in the building. If she told us to come in

the building it was just that the light had gone out. If she said don't come in the building, you couldn't go in because you were afraid someone would harm you. So, you learned to walk the walls. We'd start at the first floor window ledge. You see that ledge there... somebody would boost you up or you would stand on something like a rock, or you could jump and grab the ledge, and you could go from the first floor to the second floor. Then we'd get to the third floor, and we'd crawl in the window, and we'd be in the house. It really worked well when you were supposed to be in bed. In our court, remember the tree that was outside the kitchen window? Our mother knew some of it. We'd go out the kitchen window and jump to the tree. As I got to be an adult I would drive through there and look at the tree, how far it was away from the window and say I don't believe that I used to do that. It was just as natural as rain.

Downstairs Mom and her friends had a bench that they would sit on. The ladies would sit on the bench and talk all night and barbecue. They'd make a pit.

E.MANLOVE: We'd stay out all night in the summer, come in at 5 am or 6 am, when it got light.

GLORIA HUNTER: Sometimes I was on punishment... maybe we had been told we had to stay in the apartment. I'd go to the kitchen window and go down the tree or come out of the apartment and go up on the roof, and walk the roofs. You'd go from building to building. If I wanted to go over to my

girlfriends, I'd be on top of the roof. When I got to her building, I would simply lower myself down on a window sill and just go on around to her place. It was a whole network, and you knew Mom and her friends were going to be down there all night. Every once in awhile you'd go back home, or you'd have a kid that could come out, go peek and see if your mother was still on the front bench. Sometimes we'd be playing right behind. They'd be sitting on the bench talking, and we'd be playing right behind the apartment listening for them. So as soon as Mother said, "Wait a minute Hattie, let me go upstairs and get so and so," I knew it was time to skinny back up that tree and get in the apartment. Then we could stay out all night because they were out, if you weren't on punishment.

(E.Manlove) Sometimes I'd be mad, and I made them stay up there; and it would be so hot.

GLORIA HUNTER: We wouldn't be in there! We would do different things when we could stay out. All the kids would get together and we'd make French fries, bags of French fries. And then we would make peanut brittle because you'd go to the store and get 3 cents worth of peanuts. You'd use 5 pounds of sugar which wasn't anything because they were commodities. We would make French fries. And then you'd sit down on the front and you'd play "That's my car," while they were barbecuing or when the old ladies would sit out. We'd sit there sometimes all evening long and play, "That's my car." A car would come down the street, and if you could name the car and the model,

that was your car. But you had to call it out first. Or we'd play pony express. If somebody really owned a bike it was generally put together by parts. I don't think anybody ever had a new bike in their life. Well, a few of our friends did. That was a big thing in a kid's world because some of my girl-friends, like Dorothy, had a different father every week, so she always had new clothes and treats and things like that. And we didn't have but one father, even though he wasn't there. We were kind of different so we were always on the tail end. I don't think I ever had a bike. A lot of my friends did because of those new daddies, if she got him around the kid's birthday, I guess. We'd have the bikes and play pony express. To play, there were two groups. You'd just ride all night long and see which bike got back first. We could stay out real late because your parents told you, "Don't leave the front of the house." When the street lights came on you had to be in front of the house, and you were, and you'd just ride around the block. They'd be talking. They would pay attention, but they knew. ~~When you'd look down and see,~~ with Benson and I, you could see one or the other. That's the way we lived, especially at night.

Remember when they had the fire over at the barn? All the horses were running. I'll never forget that. There used to be a stable over there. Over there on Beaubien between Eliot and Mack. All the junk men used to stable their horses there. One night it caught fire. I'll never forget it,

because there were horses on fire running down the street, and they were screaming. I'll never forget that because I was a little kid, and we lived right there on Beaubien between Eliot and Mack. You could smell it, and I had never smelled burning flesh. They were hollering and screaming; and the men themselves, some of them were just crying like babies. They had to shoot the horses in the street. It was frightening, but it was fascinating.

One of the junk men when they shot his horse, he just laid there on that horse, he just cried. They told me that the horses were like brothers or sons to the sheenies and the junk men. The police were out there, and they were running all over. They had to rope off the area because the horses were going wild. They tried to save some, but they were running into the houses and running into cars and into the projects. So they had to shoot them. ~~A couple of them they managed to save.~~

Mr. Brown was the vegetable man, and he came every single day. He had a wagon, like Tony the Italian, but this was Mr. Brown. He had a horse, and the horse's name was George. We would lay in waiting for George, and we'd take our pea shooters. George would hit Eliot and Hastings, and he would trot around just as nice. The first eight or ten units were row houses before you got to the three story apartment buildings. He would trot, but when he got to our unit he'd take off. Mr. Brown would be yelling, "Ho, George, Ho!" But

see, George knew we were lying in waiting with those pea shooters, and we would aim for his balls or his butt. Especially on Saturday. During the week you'd be in school, and it was kind of hard to get George. George knew Saturday very well. Mr. Brown would be waiting on my mother or something, and all of a sudden he'd take off, and Mr. Brown would throw his hat like that. George would take off. I didn't know if George could smell us or somebody would land one. You waited for that.

The other thing was if you could distract Mr. Brown, you'd steal everything, the apples and the oranges while he was waiting on one of the parents or while he was watching George because he knew George was getting antsy.

That was like Dotty's. Mr. Dotty knew when we came in the store that kids were going to take certain things like the peppermints and penny candy. I'd put down 25 cents penny candy over mothers shopping list. You know how much candy you could get for 25 cents. You get 3 TAMPAX Mary Janes, Oh God, along with four bags of chips and about 50 windmills.

I'd eat the chips before I got home, and I buried the rest of it on me. Then you'd come in the apartment, and I'd say, "I got to go to the bathroom," and I'd run and put it in my stash. Or I would get a great big box of HiHo crackers.

Remember the Bookmobile? I always read a lot. Every Monday and Wednesday the Bookmobile would come. I think I had a library card when I was 5 years old. Because at Lincoln,

when you went to the first grade, your first big trip after you painted the picket fence was to go to the Bookmobile. That to me was my make-believe world. I could get books. The librarians could depend on me. They'd let you take two books. But I was there every Wednesday and Monday faithfully. The librarian started letting me take out as many books as I wanted because she knew that I would bring them back. If you went to the Bookmobile today, you would be considered a wimp. The kid's a real nerd. I was real nerdy. Then the Bookmobile was run by all white people, but they would take the time because they were there from 3 o'clock, as soon as you got out of school until about 6 pm. Sometimes they'd have books waiting for me because they knew I was coming. They'd sit there and read them to me or help me learn to read. Basically, that's how I learned to read and love books. They would say, "OK; here she comes," and they'd have my little stack. Everything from the Red Pony, and as I got older they had me reading good literature. I was reading Steinbeck when I was quite young. But it was only because those people cared. Sometimes there would be a line. They only let two kids in at a time, and I thought that Bookmobile was such a big building to me as a little kid. Now when I see one, I realize how small it was.

Mom, remember on Sundays and on the weekends when you would put Pat in the stroller and we would walk up to the main library? We would walk up to the library, and they had a

children's reading hour. Mother would leave us there. We were poor as church mice, but we could go to the children's reading hour. If Pat was one, Ben was seven and I was eight. We'd walk up there from the Brewster projects, because you couldn't always afford the bus, and we would push my sister in the stroller. Then we'd go by the bakery and smell all the goodies. It was Wonder Bread, and you could get a free sample. Then you'd go up to Vernors, and Vernors used to give the free floats on Sundays and the Vernors pop. You could go down there and get a sample.

We'd go to the library, and I remember when there would be ballets at the Art Institute. We would sit there, and I guess we just looked so poor and bedraggled that they would open the door and let us in. My mother and Ben and my baby sister. We would just be sitting there on the lawn because it was just so nice to have all that green grass. She would let us play right there at the Art Institute, on the steps. We would just sit there; and the ushers, I guess, would feel so sorry for the little black lady and her little black children and they would let us in. That's where I saw my first ballet. I saw "Sleeping Beauty." At intermission, they would put us back out. It was marvelous to us because we were black. It was like a dream world to see all the ladies dressed up.

Diana Ross grew up in the projects. When Ben went to Cass he never rode the bus. Sometimes it would be cold or snowing, and I'd say why don't you take the bus. He said "Oh, I

go down and pick up some girls that go to Cass." I never knew and he didn't say who they were. He said "They've got a quartet."

Remember the penny candy store next door to Friendship Church? The way they ~~get~~ GOT the kids to come to church was get in a bus and round you up. If you went to church, they'd promise you THAT you could go to the penny candy store and get ice cream. Some Sunday's we would go to three or four churches. You'd start at Sacred Heart because it was quiet. You'd go over to Friendship, and you'd bet on whose mother's panties you were going to see. Then you get down in the seat. We were always afraid, but you knew that there was a penny candy store next door. Then another bus would get you and take you to a sanctified church. You could dance. To us, their way of celebrating their religion was doing the chicken dance. You could make almost a quarter just going to churches because if you went to the sanctified church, they would give a kid a quarter and an ice cream. It was in Paradise Valley.

On Saturday nights you knew when the Shakers and the Kingsmen were going to fight. The word would come down by Wednesday, big rumble on the street. Grown-ups knew. By sun down, everybody would be off the street. It was just like high noon. It was like an underground society. Did they have any mothers? Nobody talked about it. Everybody knew who they were, but the parents were separate from the kids. See, a mother could have a son in the Shakers. Nobody messed with

her, but she still was not looked at as evil. Her son was a bad boy, it wasn't her fault. She was always pitied. She was well taken care of. The women folk, remember there were very few men, just those weekend fathers. The women were a separate society. Women were treated different. They weren't looked at as being vulgar, even the women who were prostitutes; they made money, so in a way they were respectable. Like my best friend, we knew her mother did, but it was all right because she could give her nice things. Now all the women might gab. My mother and Miss Hattie would sit there and talk about Miss Sadie and a couple of the others; but to kids they were fine. They had stuff. They were almost like the elite of the neighborhood.

So when there would be the Friday and Saturday night fight, by sundown, unless you were sick, everybody stayed in or you'd do your network around the buildings. You'd go up on the roof. Sometimes you couldn't go on the roof because they would fight on the roof. The battlefield was the roofs as well as the streets.

You'd get stabbed to death, shot, but not anything like it is today. A knife was the weapon of choice back then. You would live to brag about it. Adhesions from the knife were like a badge of courage. If somebody was killed, it was a rarity.

Mother would take us shopping, and we would take the street car to Belle Isle. That was the biggest trip. I

remember it ran on Beaubien and then Jefferson. I think it went across and it was such a long ride. Remember for a special treat we'd just ride from one end of the line to the other. That would be our treat on Sunday. Mother would say, "Now if you are good, we'll go for a street car ride." So all week that meant we didn't burn down the house.

Mother would make us go to bed at seven o'clock, even in the summer. We would go into the bedroom and make a tent and get some matches and cook. You see in the project you had radiators, so we'd play house, and I'd have to cook on the radiators. You'd go get a couple strings of spaghetti or macaroni and then we'd turn the radiator up. Since it didn't work in the summer, you had to cook dinner for your husband, so we'd get matches. So one night, mother was having a party, the "blue light specials" you had, and we were in there playing house, in the bedroom. It was early, every other kid is outside. So everybody would go and stand under our window and talk to us. We'd been climbing out of windows since we were five or six years old. That was the only way we got to play after seven o'clock. But we were in the bed and had made a tent, and I got a match...the covers started burning. I told Benson I had to go to the bathroom. I wasn't going to get in any trouble. The covers started burning, and I left him in there. I know eventually Eleanor was going to start smelling the smoke. Sure enough...that's what she did.

Mother was clean. At night, if you got up and you wanted

a glass of water and you would go in the kitchen and turn on the light and you would jump back cause the roaches would just scatter. And you would be stepping on them, and they would be bopping, and they would be flying out of cabinets. Everything mother had, and she still does it, was wrapped in bags with a tie on it because everything would have roaches in it.

It wasn't so much that we didn't keep our unit clean, but they would travel from one unit to the other, just marching up the stairs. Mother would never let us spend the night with too many friends because of bed-bugs. The big thing was to take a bar of soap and smash them.

Mother was always referred to as Miss Manlove. Now some of our friends had mothers, when I make reference to Miss Sadie, you know what kind of woman Miss Sadie was. But Mom, she was always Miss Manlove. She was always the lady that set table napkins on the table when we would be having grits and bologna for dinner. We always set the table. We were kind of different. Mother always reminds me of her family, reminds me of people from "Gone with the Wind," that at one time had money and became the genteel poor. Mother didn't even cook like the other black mothers. She doesn't realize that now. We were setting the table when there wasn't anything to eat. Most of our friends didn't know the proper way to set a table.

But the older people that lived in the project or who were there from the inception of the project were different. Even the kids that we hung with, when they did really bad

things, generally I was not included, neither was Benson because Miss Manlove was different. The only thing they ever let us in on was when they knocked over the Polar Bear Truck. All they did then was let me have a whole container of ice cream. But when they did things like drugs, Ben and I never got into drugs. The weed or the heroin. God knows it was prevalent enough. It's just that we were kind of different.

We'd roam. We'd go all the way downtown. We'd walk through the project, a whole band. Ben was stuck with me because he was my brother, and if he didn't let me go I was going to tell. Fruity was stuck with Peggy. There might be four little girls in the bunch with each ten little boys, and we would start in the project and walk through the project all the way downtown, all the way to the river. This means we'd go through Black Bottom. We had an uncle that ran a numbers shop. We were big shots. We'd stop at uncle's place and he'd give us 50 cents, and he gave all the other kids maybe a nickel or a quarter. Then you would go to every gas station, and you'd turn on the water and you'd drink the water. You hit every pear tree, every apple tree. You would go to a gas station and steal a couple of tires, you roll those tires until you roll them into the street or try to roll them into a car. Nobody thought about causing an accident. We'd go downtown, and we'd walk around. We're kids, seven, eight, nine, 10, 11 years old. We did it year after year. That was our fun.

We'd go to Belle Isle, walk all the way down to the river, throw rocks at the fish, scare all the little animals, do whatever kids did. Then we'd go down to Hudson's and look in the windows. A bunch of little bedraggled kids. Then you'd walk back to the project. Nobody bothered you, and you didn't bother anybody. If you were lucky, it might be a weekend when they were having the union parades. If you saw a parade coming, you'd say your father worked for Fords. Then they would give you a hot dog or lemonade or whatever. You'd go down to the railroad tracks and pick at the bums, but they'd make sure that the girls stayed away because they'd say that the bums would steal your clothes and your shoes.

By then they were building the Douglas Project. They had these big sand dunes. There's not a kid in the world that could get around playing in these big sand dunes. They were as tall as the Douglas projects, some of them. Mother knew when we had been down there because you'd have sand in your clothes and in your shoes. We'd take off our shoes and leave them way over there so they wouldn't get sand in them. We'd take our dresses and put them in our panties and play on the sand. These were mountains. Believe me, when you think that some of them had to be 3 and 4 stories high, they were just mounds of sand that they were going to use to construct those fourteen units. We had a couple of friends that were killed. One boy, he was smothered in the sand. That's why they didn't want us to play over there. It was dangerous. Kids didn't

understand that. We just knew that it was fun. Sometimes when they quit work they'd leave those great big caterpillars and things, and so you'd climb on them, not realizing that you were 2 and 3 stories high.

I could be up on Wilkins, and the jungle drums would say, "Miss Manlove is looking for Sissy." And they'd say, "Miss Manlove is on Benton." So we'd be walking up Hastings. The jungle drums would tell me to come through the court, and they would tell me don't go that way because your mother... This was the way we lived. The jungle drums, every kid along the way would tell you, "Miss Manlove was at such and such a place, cut over on Shiloh, go this way." When she'd come back I'd be sitting on the front of the apartment building.

We could walk to Diggs Funeral Home. Remember when we used to sneak in there in the funeral home? If you really wanted to have a gas, you'd go into the back. Them old dopey girls, they would get up under the casket. Did Ben tell you about the time, I guess they were having a family viewing, and they didn't realize we were in there peeking around, and all of a sudden we realized there ~~was~~ were people in there, and we crawled up under the caskets and just lay there. I don't what made us do that. We put our hands under that lady's skirt. It was shameless.

They had slumber rooms where the bodies were. It was a dare that you stick your head out and yell, "Boo!" They would be chasing us all through the funeral home, and you'd get

caught in a room with those bodies and you'd jump in the casket. But then we'd scare ourselves. Living on the third floor, those lights from the Metropolitan House of Diggs flashed red. Mother would stand there and to make us go to sleep she would say, "Woo, Woooo." The closets didn't have doors, they had a curtain. She knew when the wind was going to blow out of that bedroom window and hit that curtain because she'd say, "If you don't go to sleep, they're coming to get you and she'd go woooo." The wind would blow. We knew because we had been over at the funeral home, everybody's coming to get us. We had seen enough bodies that day to scare anybody. ~~She'd never catch on.~~

We only had one bedroom. Benson slept on a cot next to the wall. Pat as a little baby slept in a dresser drawer until she moved up to the bed with my mother and I. The three of us slept in the bed. We would say "Pull down the shades" because we knew that undoubtedly one of the bodies was after us.

Hastings was just fascinating. Peoples Bar, you could go up there and work the street as kids and you could make pretty good because you knew that everybody's weekend father or the real father went in there on the weekend, and they were going to get drunk, and the average drunk was going to see his kid and give his kid a quarter. While he was reaching in his pocket to get that, he was going to spill all of his other change, or he'd give money to every kid that was with his kid.

The pimps and the prostitutes, they had nice cars and nice clothes, and they were nice to children. If you got a favorite prostitute that you'd work for, in the winters you'd do her hot bricks for her. You'd give her bricks so she could stand in the alley. They'd warm bricks. You'd pick up a few bricks and she'd make like a stand. That way she wouldn't be down on the ground where it was cold, and you just might make like a platform for her. Or they would just warm bricks, put them next to the gallon drums, and you'd bring them to her, and she'd stand there. Sometimes you could get one who would give you a dollar or whatever then you'd go up to the 10 cent store, keep your dollar and steal everything in the 10 cent store.

E.MANLOVE: I never sat and wondered when my children were coming home. After they'd be gone too long, I'd get out and go look for them. One of the reasons why I think that a lot of children are like they are, maybe they were out in the street and you would say to the mother, "Where's so and so?" She would say, "I don't know." After they were gone so long, I'd go look for them.