PAUL SHIRLEY

Around 1918 I came from Bedford, Kentucky. When I came here they were getting these factories together. I knew a man named Mr. Cassius Cain had a Model T and the wheels looked like bicycle wheels togday, and this little Ford was just as shiny and pretty as it could be. He had to wind it up to get it started. They had traffic jams. I don't think they went over 30 miles an hour if they went that fast. The Tin Lizzie was a skinny car. Ford was the one that had a lot to do with cars on the road although there were other cars. There was the Pierce Arrow and Stanley Steamer. They had a song about the Stanley Steamer: "Take me for a ride in your Stanley Steamer, Stanley Steamer automobile. They sang that in vaudeville.

You didn't see very many women driving. Women just stayed in your place then. A woman might also have trouble cranking it up, but I noticed that men don't think much of women being in power, do they? "She should be over there somewhere, watching me do it." All my life I was wondering, don't the fools realize who got them here in the first place.

Detroit was dotted with beautiful little theaters. The Black people had a theateer called the Koppin. They had revues like Lou Leslie's Blackbirds and the Brown Skinned Models, and they had Drake and Walker. A company would have 35-40 people in it. They were specialty dancers, tap dancing, comedy, and the girls. The more girls you had the bigger the production. The Brown Skinned Models was a favorite. Every one of those girls ranged from tea color brown until a high brown. They didn't have what they called the high yellows, but they'd have these pretty brown skinned girls. They were gorgeous. Some of them could sing and dance. They didn't do no more than walk across the stage.

In the 20's was the blues. The blues and jazz was controversial then. A lot of people didn't want jazz in their house because jazz came from whore houses. "I don't want that devil music in here." My grandmother wouldn't allow you to play it in her parlor. You could play it in the kitchen or you could play it on the back porch, but you couldn't bring jazz into her parlor.

I've been on earth since 1912, and I was raised in a place here called Black Bottom. I always lived with a mixture of people from various countries and places and times. The Italians that I knew, they'd have Wednesday for Spaghetti day, and they will argue and fight, but they fought largely among themselves. Blacks will argue and fight, but they did it among themselves. When you go over to Miss Bagliotti's place, you either go over there to get some spaghetti or come in and have some vino. I don't know, we just blended. When I was a kid, we'd take our laundry to the Chinese laundry, and they could iron and wash your clothes. I don't know anybody who beats the Chinese when it comes to laundry. They had it together.

The Blacks didn't have much business here. I think their biggest business, around 1922-23, was chili parlors. They had nice little places. They had chairs like ice cream chairs with wire backs and tables. You either had the chili there or you'd have it to go. To go, they'd put in in ice cream containers with crackers on the side. That was the best chili you ever wanted to taste. The restaurants didn't start coming in until the 30's I think.

It was on a Sunday in 1943 that the riot was supposed to have started. At that time I was working out on Seven Mile Road and Woodward at a place that was run by a princess and her husband. They had this beautiful, beautiful dinner on Sunday, only one day a week and they had beautifully flaky biscuits, fried chicken, mashed potatoes with gravy and salads. It was just so gorgeous.

This particular Sunday, as I was coming down Woodward Avenue, the conductor asked us was anybody going across town because a race riot had erupted. Instead of going straight home I stopped at Sunnie Wilson's Bar, at that time it was very popular, on Forest and Hastings.

Finally about dusk I left. I hadn't thought about the riot because we were laughing and talking. I then remembered I should go home. I was just casually walking along and I was at Sherman and Gratiot. A young policeman seems to come out of nowhere and wanted to know what I was doing walking out there by myself and he said, "Don't you know there's a riot going on?"

And it didn't bother me because I had told him, "I had heard about it, but I still don't understand all of it."

So he said, "I'll walk you home," and he walked me from Sherman on Gratiot to Clinton and Russell where I lived. I thought it was so nice of him. He was a lone policeman. I don't know what he was doing out there by himself. I knew he wanted to protect me or else he would have let me go home by myself.

Hastings Street--there will never be another street like it, and it is known all over the world. Hastings Street in Detroit. I've felt pretty bad about it because I've played up and down Hastings Street as a child, and it wasn't anything that could be done about it cause they were putting the freeway in anyway.

I remember heroin. The first time I heard about it, it was brought here by three dancers. They were a dancing team, and they would come here from Spanish Harlem. At that time they were dressed in the latest jitterbug, you know, the big.....hats and the pocket chains hanging down to their knees, and they had brought this substance into Paradise Valley. Well the kids in Paradise Valley always drank whiskey, beer, wine and smoked reefer, but they didn't know anything about heroin. And this was in the 1940's. But when I came back it was 1961, and it had taken its toll. There's a strange thing about people. They didn't know about this heroin, but they're willing to try it because it came from New York.

Detroit wanted to be like New York--Hip!