INTERVIEW OF DR. HORACE JEFFERSON

Oral History Project of the WestSiders

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY: Louis Jones

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Q Dr. Jefferson, first of all, thank you very much for taking time out of your schedule to talk to us.

A My pleasure.

Q To start, could you tell us about your parents, where they come from and how they got to Detroit?

A Well, I guess it is best to start with my father, John Lee Jefferson, who was born in Fort Valley, Georgia and went into the service in World War I. His picture is over there. He was discharged, I guess it was 1919, and he came here to Detroit. At that time, Ford had its famous $5.00 a day line there. He came here -- not knowing anyone -- on the train from Hartford, Connecticut, after he was discharged. He landed downtown at Griswold and Michigan Avenue and there was a police officer at the intersection with these little stop signals that were mechanically operated by traffic cops. My dad went up to him and asked “where can a fellow get a job around here.” He said, “oh, you are a veteran; get on the streetcar and go on out to Ford; they are hiring out there.” He went out to Ford. He was hired and he had a job before he had a place to stay. As a matter of fact, he stayed that night with a fellow he met on-the-job out there.

So he was the beginning of it, the beginning of the Jeffersons coming up. In those days I guess he sent a letter to my mother and told her to come on up. She said she wasn't coming up here; “it is too cold.” He said, “I am not coming back down there.” Oh, they were married at this time. So she came up and so that is what started this wing of the Jefferson family coming up. His brother came up; his sisters came up, and then my mother's side, the Masons, came up here. So that's the genesis of my parents coming here. Now, my father married my mother down in Georgia. She was from Macon, Georgia: Mattie Louise Mason. I can go on back to my father's father, I don't know if you want to do that.

Q They came from the Georgia area?

A Yes, Georgia.

Q Well, what kind of work did they do?

A On my dad's side, they were carpenters. That is what he did down there and he helped his dad build homes down there. On my mother's side, they were always businessmen, shoe repairmen. As a matter of fact, Mason’s Shoe Hospital used to be on the East Side; that was my uncle’s and there was another Uncle Mason over here on the West Side on Milford.

Q So family members from both sides of the family came up to Detroit?

A Yes, after John Lee Jefferson. He was the first one that came up and then everyone else. You know, you were not going to go up unless you knew someone who had something of sorts. That is where the Masons and the Jeffersons started.

Q Just remaining in Georgia, was that an option at that time?

A Not for my dad.

Q Why not?

A Well, because of the Jim Crow situation down there and the fact that he had served in the Army and saw what it was like in another part of America. He made up his mind he wasn't going back.

Q So when he came, he started to work in the plant?

A Yes.

Q What kind of work did he do?

A I wish I knew, initially. He went to Ford Trade School. He was always good with his hands. He went to the Ford Trade School while he was there and he became a machine repairman, all through the 20s and, as a matter of fact whenever they had changeovers, he kept working because they had to make the dies; he was a tool and die man.

Q Was that unusual? I often hear African Americans, in those years, talking about working in the foundry. I don't hear as much of them working as tool and die folks.

A That is what I am saying. You asked me the question what work did he do when he first got there. All I can remember was that he was a tool and die man; a repairman and a tool and die man. He was always good in mechanics. As a matter of fact, when I got to Cass, I used his German-made drawing tools in drafting. My instructor looked at them and said, “where did you get these?” They were quality

products.

Q Do you still have them?

A My son has some of them.

Q Did he ever talk about what it was like working in the plant?

A Oh, yes. Yes, he talked about the kind of problems he ran into. He developed a hand when automation was coming along. He developed a hand that would grab doors and pull them out of the press, thereby preventing them from jamming. The ones they had coming out of Buffalo or somewhere, would jam. Well, he designed and built this hand that would go in and pull the part out of the press. But, in those days, anything you did along those lines belonged to Ford.

Q What were race relations like in those days? Did he talk about that at all?

A It was racism in those days and they used the “N” word. That is just the way it was. You rolled with the punches and whatnot. He would always tickle me. After he retired he said “I will outlive all of them.” He lived until he was 96 years old.

Q Did he talk about how that racism manifested itself and how it affected him?

A It was blatant and blacks kept to themselves, and whites kept to themselves. Really, the only conversations that you had between each other was in conjunction with the job. Other than that when you went to lunch, you separated. When you got on the streetcar, it wasn't

necessary, but they would still not sit together.

Q Was he a union man?

A Oh, yes.

Q Which local did he belong to?

A Local 600.

Q Did he talk about it?

A He talked about the days when they had the strikes back in the 30's. Initially, no one cared for the union and what they wanted. “Why would you strike? You have a job?” is what some would ask. The conditions were such that the men wanted better conditions. They knew how much the company was making and they felt they should have a bigger share of the pie.

Q initially, he didn't move to the West Side, right?

A No, no, no. He was renting down on Trumbull and Grand River in that area. When my mother came, he moved over on 28th Street on the West Side in a two-family flat. This was back in 1920, I think. It was there he saw them build our house on 30th Street, which was the house I grew up in. He told my mother, “I am going to buy that house.”

Q What was it about that house that struck him or was it that neighborhood?

A At that time, he worked at Ford's. They had quite a few single homes in those days. People wanted to buy single homes rather than living in apartments. When he first went

over there, he rented the upstairs in a two-family flat.

Q Was he there for a long time before he moved?

A He was there for two years and then in 1922 he bought that house I was telling you about.

Q A new house?

A Yes.

Q Was that a big deal, to buy a new house?

A Oh, what are you talking about: To buy a house period was a big deal. All we could do was rent all over Detroit on the East Side, and everywhere else; we were renting from people.

Q So what was it about the West Side that allowed your father to buy a house as opposed to rent one?

A Well, I say it was a single home and it was close to Kelsey Hayes and Ford and some of the other plants. I guess the people that came in there and bought the single homes are what made the West Side that you are referring to. Do you understand? This was their property. They wanted this property. They wanted to keep their homes up, paint them, have lawns, all of that sort of thing and so it was like a village.

Q I often hear people talking about the West Side and the village and well-maintained homes. Can you tell me a little more about that?

A Sure. Karl Young started the WestSiders. For me all my life, it had bugged me as to what went on there. It was a

small area bounded on the west by Epworth, on the south by Warren, on the north by Tireman, and on the east by the Grand Boulevard. This was the area, although it expanded a little later across the Boulevard. The people who moved in here and bought these homes and started raising families, their values were values of hard work and instilling that and education into their kids; okay. So the genesis came from those initial persons who moved in, in the early 20s. That is where that started and was passed on to the kids that came on.

Now if I can go a little bit farther. At one of the WestSiders' meetings, a young lady asked a question. She was in the organization, not because she grew up there, but because she was interested in what was going on there. She said, "what made it so interesting? Which is the same thing you asked. Well, I tell you this, while I was at the University of Michigan, there were hardly any blacks there. Those that were from Detroit, practically all of them were from the West Side. They had gone to Wingert, Sampson, Northwestern or Cass High Schools.

Q Tell me something about the values that you grew up with, the routines or rules that your parents had?

A Okay. One thing: As a child you learned that you didn't hit a woman; that was instilled in us early on. "You do not hit a woman; do not touch a women. If your sister does anything, you come to me and I will take care of it." That was instilled in us early, number one. It was equivalent to capital punishment, if you violated that.

We had Jobs around the house. I had to wheel coal into the coal bin around the side of the house and dump it. The coal man would come and dump the coal in front of the house. I

had to shovel coal and put it in a wheel barrel and wheel it around the side and dump it down into the coal bin. I had to cut the grass and shovel snow.

As soon as the snow melted, I had to turn up the dirt all around the fence. My mother loved flowers. She was known as "The Flower Girl." So I had to go all round the fence and turn up the soil around there. I hated this.

Now, my sisters had chores also in the house, the washing of the dishes, the ironing of clothes, and all of the things that you attribute to women. So you had your chores. You had things you had to do. And in those days there was corporal punishment. That was a great persuader for a young person.

Q Protesting about the jobs, is that something that would come to mind, For example, would you ever ask, “why do I have to do this?”

A You mean as a youngster?

Q Yes.

A I wanted to get outside and play and go with my friends; that was paramount in my world. Some kids whose parents would not have them doing chores, you just didn't want them to see what you were doing.

Q How old were you when you started doing these chores around the house?

A Oh, 10, 11, 12, yes.

Q What about your next door neighbors and down the block: What was the relationship between you and your

family and other families on the block?

A It was an extended family relationship. If you did something bad, you got a spanking from them. When you got home, you got a second spanking, or if you did something bad in school by the time you got home your mother knew about it when you got home. It was a very close relationship, “do not walk on the Jones' grass; do not play on their grass” were the kind of things we were told. It was something that was done early-on. You thought nothing of it, it was just something -- these were just the terms.

Q Did you get in trouble? Did that happen to you: While you did something at school or down the block and the neighbor reprimanded you in some way?

A Oh, yes.

Q What happened?

A Well, we used to like to steal some cherries off of the neighbor's cherry tree from across the alley on 28th Street. We would climb up on the garage and sneak and steal some of the cherries. He caught us one time, and called my dad, and I got my punishment. Abe, that is my buddy, he got his too; Nathan got his too. Later on when we grew older, he got tired and said “look, whenever you want any cherries, come around here and just let me know. You can just go on back and get them.” We never bothered him again because we didn't have to climb up on the garage and move and pull the tree over to pull the cherries off.

Q Tell me about school. I know that you went to McMichael?

A Yes.

Q And Wingert before that?

A Yes. I went to Wingert Elementary School. I lived on 30th Street and it was the dividing line for Sampson and Wingert. If you lived on my side of the street, which was the east side, you went to Wingert. Those who lived on the west side of the street went to Sampson. So I knew everybody; I knew those people on my street, but I knew the people who lived in back of me towards Wingert School and a lot more Sampson people than most others.

Q What was Wingert like?

A Wingert was a good school, when I think about it, because we had many courses for an elementary school. We had what was called manual training. We had woodworking courses at that time. We didn't get into metal work, but we did get into lathes and power tools and that sort of thing.

The girls, of course, had their home economics type of courses where they learned to sew and those types of things. I had geography there at Wingert and I remember studying the Baltic States. Later, I was in Toronto and I was talking to a lady and she said “oh, I am from…You wouldn't want to know where I am from. I am from Estonia.” I said, “Estomia, yes. That is way up there: Luthuania, Latvia and Estonia.” That popped up from elementary school from the maps we had to color from the countries in Europe and the populations and what were their chief products and so forth. All of that, I had at Wingert. I don't think they have that today in school.

At that time Hitler was on the rise and we kids in the 7th and

8th grade would gather in the auditorium. We would listen to Hitler's address. Now the purpose of this was to know what was going on in the world. They would explain it in English. All over the country at that time wherever that man spoke, people all over were listening to him. Today, they would want to charge him with Nazism maybe or something. This is where you learned it is a lot bigger world than our little neighborhood.

Q This was before World War II?

A Just before.

Q What did they say about Hitler or what did you learn about him as you were listening to his speeches?

A Well, I was quite young at that time. I know how I felt as I listened to him. I thought, “well, the United States is the strongest country in the world. We would be able to protect ourselves from this man. I think he had moved into part of France and moved into Austria and these kinds of places. Who is going to stop him?” It turned out that the United States wouldn't have been able to stop him at that time; nobody could have stopped him at that time because none of the democracies were armed.

Q Also, Wingert was an integrated school?

A Oh, yes. At that time it wasn't a thing of whites and blacks. We had a German youth home that was across the street, where kids without parents stayed and they attended Wingert, also.

Q And they were German kids?

A Yes, but also Jewish and English. They lived in that

area across the Boulevard also.

Q As you were learning about Hitler with the German kids there, was there any kind of tension or did that incite any type of discussion?

A Well, I don't think so other than when we got into geography. They would draw the maps; it wasn't in depth as a youngster. It turned out that it was very important to me later in life. Some years later I was drafted into the service. This meant a lot to me but the discussions occurred in the geography class, but primarily in terms of locating which country had been invaded, but not so much the politics of it.

Q What was the relationship between the black students and white students? Did you have interracial friendships?

A Oh, yes, we had friendships, but they were the same as I described where my dad worked. They were separate. Separate. Separate. You walked together. In class you were mixed up, and you talked to each other. As soon as you left class, you had to walk in lines between classes going from one room to the other and we usually kind of got next to our friends and that sort of thing. That is what racism does.

Q Were there any special teachers?

A Mrs. Adams, Mrs. Morrow, and my 8th grade teacher whose name I can't think of right now. At one time, I loved building model airplanes -- me and my buddy, Abe, we would build the airplanes and fly them and then we would hang them from the ceiling in our homes and make all of the sounds: “ah-hr-hr-hr-hr,” and all of that. My sister told me after I left, a kid made a noise like that and the teacher said,

“Horace Jefferson's spirit must still be here.” Mrs. Adams taught us so much about what we were going to run into later on in life.

Q Do you recall anything in particular?

A No. What were some of the things? Well, you got me, when I try to get the particulars. I don't want to take up too much time. I will interrupt you when I remember something.

Q What about McMichael. What kind of school was that and what do you recall about your experience in going there?

A Let me backup a little bit. I was so crazy about these airplanes at Wingert that I flunked my class. I think it was the 6th grade when I flunked: me and my buddy, Abe, both of us. That's what turned me on and got me serious in school, because I was back with kids that I considered younger than me. All of my peer group had gone on and were ahead of me. So I started making all As in class. In those days, it was Es for excellent. I started making all Es in everything. I did well in all of the classes I went in because I was repeating a lot of the stuff I already had. So Mrs. Morrow said, “we are going to put you back up on probation with your class.” Well after that I never needed any more motivation.

So now we can get over to McMichael. I cut the mustard at McMichael. In other words, I made As at McMichael. My problem at McMichael was I wanted to be an Aeronautical Engineer. The counselor had shunted me into this machine shop course, which I loved turning metal on lathes and all of that. When I got where I applied for Cass, I was told I

couldn't go there: “you don't have any algebra,” is how it was put. I had machine shop math there and that sort of thing. So I had to go to summer school to take algebra before I could be admitted to Cass.

Q Why would she try to move you into machine shop as opposed to --

A The counselor: Racism.

Q Racism; okay.

A In other words, they would look at some black kid and say “well, you need to go into machine shop or something.” Also you had the woodworking and that sort of thing; this is a natural for you. I told my counselor, this was a man. I told him, I wanted to be an Aeronautical Engineer. I wanted to go to Cass. The neighbor that lived across the street from me went to Cass. He wound up becoming an Aeronautical Engineer with the Boeing Corporation. So I wanted to go where the Aero program was.

Q What was the response when you said that?

A I don't recall a response. “You are just coming out of 8th grade. This is what is best for you.”

Q When you were held back for a minute there, how did your parents respond to that?

A My dad didn't respond too happily. My mother cried. Because I think they knew that I could do better. We were so caught up in the airplanes. We built airplanes after airplanes; we loved them. I had disappointed my parents. I never had a problem after that.

Q It motivated you?

A Yes, when she put me back up with my class, I never needed any more motivation when it came to studying.

Q My sense is that folks that grew up on the west side, I have heard from the folks, most of the folks after completing McMichael, went on to Northwestern. You went on to Cass. What motivated you to do that?

A The only school that had the Aero curriculum. I wanted to get into airplanes. And so when I got there, at Cass, the curriculum at one time they combined it. It was auto-aero curriculum; okay. I learned a tremendous amount at that school. We had to tear down an airplane engine, radial engines and put them back together. We had the old Liberty engine that was there. We didn't tear it all the way down, but we had the engine that we had to take apart. Then as you proceeded through the school, you learned about airplanes, wingfoils, stall speeds and the relationship of the wingfoils in terms of how much they could lift at certain speeds. When you got to the 12th grade, you were given certain givens like the horsepower of the engine or wingfoil, which was standard with the government. You had to design an airplane and give it characteristics: take-off speed, stall speed, and service ceiling. And you couldn't cheat because your givens were different from everybody else's. But that was the kind of school Cass was (along with learning to weld) all of that kind of thing; besides, the normal courses, the courses in English and Chemistry and all of the other courses that you had.

Q Dr. Jefferson, you mentioned that when you left Cass you went to the University of Michigan. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

A No, not directly. I left Cass. We had that riot in July 1943 in Detroit. And it was right after I graduated. I still had clothes down there. I had clothes down there in the locker room and me and my buddy, Willie Flennoy had to go down there to close our lockers. Unbeknownst to us, three blocks away they were pulling blacks off the streetcar at Vernor and Woodward and beating them up. We walked down Grand River. Willie and I always walked to Cass. We walked down Grand River to Cass. When I got back to the black area of the west side, people were standing on the porches. I was wondering what was going on. We got to Willie's house first. His mother was so glad to see him. I still had to walk a little farther and when I got home, I found out all of this stuff that was going on.

Q Did it surprise you at all?

A Yes, when I got home, we knew nothing about it.

Q Did it surprise you that something like that would take place?

A All because this happened over at Northwestern also. It happened at Northwestern, in 1940.

Q We will get back to 1940 in a second. But in 1943, were you surprised?

A I certainly was because I didn't know what was going on even though I was three blocks away because we had walked to Cass. We always walked and stopped at the Wonder Bread Company and spent our money on day-old cakes with money I was supposed to use for other things: bus fare and other things. So when we got back home that is when I found out about the riot. People were standing out on their porches. I didn't know what was going on. Our

parents were worried about us.

Q In terms of race relations at that period in history, did that surprise you based on that, that there would be a riot in the first place?

A I didn't think there would be a riot. People got along. You said hello to each other. They were separate, but they got along. Once in awhile you would pickup a paper and see things. People would use the "N" word a lot of times, but hey, you lived with that; that's life.

Q Now in 1940 there was an incident at Northwestern?

A Right.

Q What do you remember about that?

A I only remember that Abe and I, in order for us to go home where I lived, we would have to cross the Boulevard and Grand River. We had to cross there so we had to walk out the front of Northwestern. We saw all of these white guys standing around, but I thought nothing of it. We walked in the middle of it. The next thing I knew, boom, a guy hit me. I turned around, Abe and I, we ran past McMichael, straight past Northwestern over by the Olympia. Then, we had to walk home down McGraw. So that was my first taste of blatant racism.

Q What happened to make that incident take place?

A I have forgotten what caused that. I have forgotten what caused that one. The historians would be able to tell you.

Q You can tell us first. But, if you don't know, that is

fine. Now, tell me, you mentioned that you originally went to the University of Michigan?

A Yes.

Q Was that during World War II?

A The riot occurred and right after that everybody on the West Side was drafted. I think it was a coincidence. I was 18 years old and had to go. I went in and I had had two years of ROTC at Cass. So I was placed over a group of five hundred men that went into the service at that time, because it was segregated at that time. There weren't any blacks that had military training. So they looked through the thing and said, “Horace Jefferson?” “Yes.” “You are in charge of these men until you get where you are going.” It wasn't nothing. I had to call off the names of every one on the train. I think I have those orders up in my home. I don't throw anything away.

Q Did you see any action in the war?

A No, no. As I said, I was ROTC and we didn't have many trained black personnel so I spent my time training them.

Q Over here?

A Right.

Q Where were you?

A First down at Camp Lee, Virginia and then down at Camp Ellis, Illinois and then finally Camp Plauche, Louisiana. The group that I went in with went overseas and fought in Okinawa.

Q Tell me about the University of Michigan. How did you choose University of Michigan and I also understand that you lived in a rooming house?

A That was the Alpha House. No, I stayed in a rooming house when I first started. I chose the University of Michigan. I was born and raised a Wolverine. All I knew was Ohio State and Michigan and I wanted to go to Michigan from the start. There was no other school in my mind except to go to Michigan. I didn't even apply to any other school.

Q What would you say about your education there?

A Excellent. Excellent education. Still had the racism but it was just excellent.

Q How did the racism manifest itself? What did you experience?

A For example, in Dental School, the white dental students were able to go into dental fraternities. The Professors belonged to the dental fraternities. You could see the important previous examinations that were given by certain professors. You could see the questions, their pet questions and whatnot. If you were black, forget it. We had to go from the ground up. You had to know everything that was there, so that you could pass.

Q Did you ever consider applying to the white fraternity?

A No, my classmate Dr. Hanna applied and I think he was accepted in one of the dental fraternities.

Q He was black?

A He was the only other black in the class, in a class of one hundred. I think he was accepted to one of them. I was already in a fraternity -- Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity -- and the chances of the two blacks getting into a fraternity -- you know. The reason that Hanna got in, I think he was a veteran also. He was married and he lived down in Ypsilanti in the quonset huts down there at that time. He drove back and forth with white dental students. He became friends with them, and I think that is how he got into the dental fraternity.

Q Who was your family dentist when you were growing up as a kid? I remember Dr. Grimes, and Whitby; do you recall those names at all?

A I am sorry to say I didn't have a family dentist. I was fortunate that I grew up and didn't have too many cavities. I didn't see a dentist. I was not unlike a whole lot of other blacks. I knew people who had gone to them and I knew people would complain about going to a dentist. So, as I was growing up I had not gone to a dentist. I hadn't lost any teeth. My dad loved planting his vegetables. My mother loved to garden. He would plant his vegetables in the vacant lot. So we had plenty of fresh vegetables and I attribute some of that to keeping my teeth in good shape.

Q There is something I definitely want to talk to you about: Milford Street and then the Gang. Can you tell us a little about that. Milford was a somewhat bustling street, right?

A It was quite a bustling street. It was the main commercial street for that area. You could get anything you wanted up and down Milford Street, no matter what, whether clothing, or if you wanted a hair cut, drug store, everything

was up and down Milford Street. Now, you always have a bunch of misfits in every neighborhood. They were the Milford Street Gang, and they called them that because they hung down on the corner of my street, 30th and Milford outside of Kreugers, which was an ice cream parlor. Some girls used to like to come there and all of these no-good-nicks were hanging around, the police would have to come and say “get away from here.” That was the Milford Street Gang.

When Joe Scaggs and my younger brother started having a luncheon with a bunch of the old fellows who graduated from Northwestern, they called it the Milford Street Gang.

Q You hung out at the ice cream parlor. What kind of things did you do?

A We had a juke box there, you go there and you put your nickles in there and get your ice cream soda and the light was on there at night. It was just kind of a social gathering place for teenagers.

Q What would you talk about?

A Girls. We didn't talk too much about cars; nobody had a car, but we did talk about the different makes and models. “Boy, this is my car,” you know. “I wish I had this or that sort of thing.” You talked about school and the instructors and sports, you know, and what different people were doing.

Q Would Joe Louis be a subject of conversation?

A Oh, yes.

Q Tell me what you heard about Joe Louis?

A Well, what I really remember about Joe Louis was that on the nights that he fought, if you stepped out in the street, there was nothing, complete silence, in the summer time. As soon as he knocked out his opponent you could hear these old wooden screen doors, and they had springs on them and you could hear them; they went plop, plop. People running out and running down to the corner and cars would blow their horns, people screaming and hollering, running to the corner. Whenever he won a fight, it was just like New Years down there on Milford.

Q People would gather around radios since there was no TV?

A There were no TVs. They were around the radio. As a matter of fact, you couldn't walk past a house without hearing “a right to the jaw and a left to the right side.” You could probably hear through the open windows in the summertime since there was no air conditioning. I could always hear the screen doors, plop, plop, plop, all down the line and people were running out and running down to the corner and screaming and hollering and cars blowing their horns, just like a wedding procession with cars blowing their horns and whatnot.

Q Now, what happened when he lost to Max Schmelling?

A Man, it was just like a funeral, silence. You couldn't believe it. It was of all people, “man, Hitler's Aryan Representative.” That was just too much. Later, it was sweet payback, sweet payback. That was all over the country, because Joe Louis was representing the country at that time.

Q One thing I heard about the West Side is that it was a safe neighborhood where people left windows and doors open. Can you speak to that a little bit?

A Sure, I can. As a matter of fact, my dad used to take us out to Belle Isle; we would sleep out there overnight and we would lie on quilts and things on very hot nights. You left your windows open; you didn't worry about anybody bothering you. It just didn't happen. It was a different time. There weren't as many people then, the population wasn't as thick as it is now. You knew people then. That has changed. The Milford Street Gang has a Christmas Party every year and people come in from all over. I think that one of the reasons that they come is that for that brief moment you are back in those days when people were civil to each other.

Q Now, the Milford Street Gang was actually formed some years after you guys used to hang out, is that right?

A When you say "hang out", I was not hanging out as much as some of the rubby-dubs. Some of the guys were in trouble with the police. They were the ones that were hanging out and giving the Milford Street Gang its name. Milford Street Gang later on was made up of teachers and all of that, but they kind of took the name of Milford Street Gang.

Q Now the more rougher guys, jitterbugs, I have heard that term?

A Right, right, jitterbugs, right.

Q Why didn’t you hang out with them?

A No, I didn't hang out with them, no. We grew up with

them and went to Wingert with them. We knew them. And they had these different gangs on the other side of the Boulevard. It was a gang and while these guys from the other side came over and bothered you, they would have to deal with the rough guys because they knew you growing up. There was one guy, Rob Roy; we were younger than him. He would walk by with his peg pants on and say, “take one, take two: two for me and one for you.” We just thought that was so far out.

Q What was he talking about?

A It was “I am on top” you know. Take one, take two, two for me and one for you. I always remember that. It was something like that.

Q Your parents would not allow you to hang out?

A No, no. These guys would walk down the street real slow, wearing peg pants, there would be five or six of them. They would hang out on the corner and the police would come along and tell them to get going. But no, we were into building model airplanes and building bunk houses and building kites. We would go to the library and build kites and all of that.

I told you once before about the number of men from the West Side who were up at Michigan. After I left the meeting in which this young lady asked the question, I thought to myself, “hey Jeff, that was just the men who were on the GI Bill. How about all of the people who came from the same area who went the rout you were saying, who went to Wingert and then on to Northwestern, or Sampson and then Northwestern.” When I started looking at that, a huge number came out of that area. They went on to be teachers

and judges and what have you: professional people, business people. They had to go through the Northwestern route. I started thinking about the women in my class that went on to become teachers. It was phenomenal, the ones that came out of there that went on to become productive citizens in Detroit.

Q What was it about your neighborhood, the West Side that resulted in so many prominent people moving on?

A What was it about it?

Q About the neighborhood?

A It was the values early-on. You worked for what you got. You didn't go and try to take it away from someone else. They didn't B.S. You didn't put it on with a suit and tie; that is superficial. Values had to come from inside. They came from our parents with the working ethic and it is necessary to pass that working ethic on to our siblings and to those who have moved on. Very important because the current generation thinks that just because I put this on and look like Madison Avenue, I am there. No way. No way.

Q What was your faith? You were at St. Matthews?

A Yes, I was raised Episcopal. I married a Catholic woman and my kids and everybody is Catholic. I am non-committal in that area.

Q Does your faith have a role in some of the values you are talking about?

A Well, sure.

Q Can you speak on that a little bit?

A Your ten commandments -- it is a basic as to how we treat other persons. That would be very basic. I was not a church going person every Sunday. My mother and father were; some of my siblings are. But the Ten Commandments are the basis of our human civility.

Q How did your family, you and your family come to move from the West Side? Why aren't you there today, for example?

A Well, when I got married, my wife and I did stay at my dad's house there on 30th Street. We couldn't stay there for long because my mother and father were there. So, I moved into Judge Ford's place -- Geraldine Bledsoe Ford, that is. At that time she was my wife's age and we were starting our families out. I knew Leonard Ford from Michigan. They had a four-family flat and they had one vacant, and so we moved into the one vacant flat on Calvert and 12th Street.

Q That is not the West Side, right?

A No, no. That would be the reason that I moved from the West Side. Okay, I got married, had a wife and started my own family. This apartment was available and this was over on Calvert. That would be the reason I moved away from the West Side.

Q Were there opportunities to remain in the West Side, though? Why did you move somewhere else?

A Well, because at that time as a dentist I had taken over the practice of Dr. Catchings who was over on the East Side. As a young dentist coming out, you try to pick an area where you are going to be successful. I didn't want to go into an area where there was an established practitioner. I

wanted to get an area where I could develop my own practice, something that is very difficult to do right now, by the way. That would involve me going to a completely different area.

Q Did you have any role models?

A Oh, yes. I spoke of Ambrose Nutt, who was an Aeronautical Engineer, who grew up across the street from me and went on to become a designer. He went on to become an Aeronautical Engineer for Boeing out in Seattle. There was Dr. Remus Robinson, a physician in Detroit who was the first Registered black Surgeon in Detroit. He also was a member of the Detroit Board of Education, if not the president, for a long time. Dr. Marjorie Pebbles-Meyers, who was married to Rickford Meyers, the Rector down at St. Matthews Episcopal Church.

Q Can you tell us something about the relationship with them, how were they your role models?

A Well, Dr. Meyers, before I went into the service, established a class to introduce teenagers to sex education. It was mixed: boys and girls. She was the one who chaired this. We were all on edge in the first session. We got to be comfortable with each other and we could ask what was very important to us. Not only that, just being a female black doctor at that time just spoke a lot to me.

Q Is there anything else that you would like to discuss that we haven't already discussed?

Let me ask you this: You said that you wanted to pass on the values from the West Side, I am assuming to your children and grandchildren. How do you do that; what do you tell them?

A You can't just do it by talking. So many of us just want to talk. We have men who are fathers. Yes, I talk to them. Well, it is the way you live. It is not just the talking; it must be fortified by the things you do over a protracted period of time. That is it. We live in a society where we want instant this, instant that, videogames. “Why isn't this over with now” and that sort of thing? As human beings, it is not only the preaching, it is the way the individual making the noise, lives himself. The rooms of my son and my daughter weren't quite the way my wife would like. But whenever we went to visit her -- she went to Michigan -- they were immaculate. So that means they heard their parent's voice, even though we weren't there. It is this sort of thing that I am alluding to. It is the way individuals live and the way they treat others. That is what is coming out of the West Side.

Q I am assuming that you went to the Granada Theater.

A Yes.

Q Can you tell us about that experience? Did you go to the midnight shows?

A At one time we had to sit in the balcony at the Granada Theater. Later on, what I recall about the Granada Theatre, there were always people walking around with cigarettes in their mouths and wearing big apple hats that often blocked your view of the movie. Now the Beechwood Theater, that was a smaller theater at Warren and Beechwood. We would go and look at the spooky movies. After we got home we were shaking after leaving those theaters. The Granada Theater initially was a segregated theater.

Q So they had to shut them down.

A Yeah, right.

Q Was there bitterness over that?

A Oh, yes, and then finally the neighborhood had to talk to that man -- or those people -- and broke that up.

Q So you remember going there on a non-segregated basis as well?

A Oh, yes.

Q How did that make you feel?

A Made me feel great, except it was quiet when we were there on a segregated basis. As time went on, people weren't there for the movie but were there for a social thing. It was quite an experience.

Q It was a whole different era back then?

A Oh, yes. The West Side was a village; believe me it was a village. It bothered me all of my life from the time I was in the service, from the time I was at Michigan, “well, what went on there? Why did everyone succeed? Why did that happen?” That is a very small area compared to the whole city.

So when Karl decided to put the WestSiders together, it grew out of the Milford Street Gang group. The Milford Street Gang group, a bunch of fellows who got together with Joe Scaggs, and had lunch. The Milford Street Gang is a comrade oriented organization. Karl wanted a goal-oriented organization. That's what the WestSiders became.

Q The Milford Street Gang meets today?

A Every first Wednesday.

Q What do you do to this day?

A Meet, talk, have lunch, have a little wine. You don't have to send out any notices; people show up the first Wednesday, period. It is not a formal gathering. The WestSiders are controlled by an agenda; they are goal-oriented. We need both.

Q Very good. Thank you.