INTERVIEW OF DR. JEAN ERNST MAYFIELD

Oral History Project of the WestSiders

Interview Conducted by: Louis Jones

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Q First of all, Dr. Mayfield, thanks for taking time out of your schedule to speak with us. We are very excited about this opportunity. Just to begin, tell me about your family in the South and when they came to Detroit.

A I grew up on Beechwood Street, between Moore Place and Milford as a small child. Our history goes back to my great grandmother, that is as far as we can go. They became a part of the Lister Hill Plantation. So we still have ancestors that relate to the present governor there. We have had cousins to go down and validate that with grave stones and artifacts. So the best place to start is with the elder relatives that I grew up with, besides my mom. That would be Big Clarence's Sister as we referred to them: Clarence and Hattie Searcy. They lived at 6385 Beechwood. Along that street we knew every neighbor. So the neighborhood was very nurturing. We knew the neighbors up and down the street and across the street. My great uncle, Big Clarence, was very proud to be one of the first homeowners along with the rest of the homeowners on that street. We took piano lessons. We had to be in before the sun went down. We came in in the evening and we cleaned up, oiled up, went back out to play and had to be in before anybody came out to get you. So we would sit on the steps and play hide and

go seek, and do those kinds of things.

Q What do you remember about your neighbors right next door and up and down the block, any particular memories?

A Yes, I can go all the way down to Moore Place before John Wesley was built. The church was built during my teen years. As a child there was Stark's Grocery Store on the corner. Next to that was a couple of neighbors that we knew quite well. We knew the Quarles. There was Ernest, Mildred and Fred. Next to them were the Tuckers, which was a huge family. I won't go through all of those names. The Jacksons owned the fish and poultry market up on Moore Place. I used to babysit their daughter. They adopted a daughter; her name was Barbara Ann. Then there was me, Sister and Big Clarence. They helped mama raise all five of us. I would sit on the steps. I was Baby Jean, because further down on Beechwood there were the Seiberts and they had the Elder Jean. So, they called her Big Jean, and they called me Baby Jean, which I resented all the way through my middle school years. I dared anybody to call me Baby Jean when I went to high school. Then there were the Tuckers. The Tuckers owned a gas station: Stanton's. He owned a pool shop, right up on Tireman Avenue. That was a novelty to us for homeowners, now business owners. One of the first pharmacists was on Moore Place and further down Milford there was Mason's Drug Store. We were very proud to do business in those black enterprises in those days. There was the shoe shop, that was the Thompson's Shoe Shop up on Milford. There was a soda bar that we would go to and a candy store. We didn't have to go too far from the community to enjoy ourselves and the neighbors were very nurturing. They would tell on us.

We had a school teacher by the name of Mrs. Brown that lived the other side, two-doors down headed towards Milford. She delighted us as youngsters because Mrs. Brown had the habit of answering the questions she asked. For example, she would ask and answer: “how are you feeling? that's fine, that's fine. How is mother? that's good. that's good.” We would imitate her and play school imitating Mrs. Brown. There were the Craigs’ that lived down the street. My mother and the elder mother were very good friends. I think Herb Craig is still living. Many of the others have made their transition like in all families. The Tuckers opened up a car wash next to Vic's Store on Tireman Avenue. There were many other exciting things to us as youngsters that we were able to participate in at that time.

Q Where in the South did your family come from?

A My grand dad, Willie Burnett came from Virginia, coal mining, all the way back through to my great grandmother and granddad Willie Burnette. My grandmother had three husbands, and this was I think the second one. They pulled up in front of the house in a taxi cab. He got out of the taxicab, shotgun first, to the embarrassment of my aunt who was very straight laced. Many came through another great grandmother, Helen Hamilton who came from Louisiana. Helen Hamilton made her home in New York. She said that was as far South as she ever wanted to go. I think she lived at 467 West 159th Street, which they referred to as the Hill in New York. She came here to visit. So my family basically came that route. The Hill portion of my family settled in Chicago and they would come in and out to visit. They would all stay over to Sister and Big Clarence's house. So we took that kind of route coming up from the South.

Q So what motivated your family to migrate to Detroit?

A That was the five dollars a day wage that the Ford Motor Company was offering. Many of them came up to work originally. My great aunt would make room for them. We put the old furniture into the basement and that turned into the kid's playroom or the dad's poker room. Our parents were no exception.

Q Did your family own the home that you lived in?

A Yes, at 6385 Beechwood. I have the old, old pictures of Sister and Big Clarence that are upstairs in our archives, and the old picture of our great grandmother. That is as far as we can go back with the pictures.

Q Did you remain on that block throughout or did you move much at all?

A We stayed there but then mom moved a lot. So I was back and forth. She ironed shirts for the neighborhood. So the neighborhood especially guys always bought their shirts and she would iron them. Sometimes I would have to deliver them. So when my sisters and brothers would give me all of the dishes to wash then I would run to Sister and Sister would care for me there. So we stayed there. I was at 6385 Beechwood but basically I was also at 5349 Tireman, which is with my mom and my sisters and brothers. We lived up over a dry goods store. It was called Passmore's. So we would get a lot of things from Passmore's like socks and undershirts and things of that nature. The building no longer exist. I think there is a church there that stands there now. But I basically stayed there until I went away to college.

That first year in college I met my husband and we married in '52. Our reception was held there. We were married by

the late Jesse J. McNeil of Tabernacle, about five ministers ago. Mama and her sister Eleanor were left there at the house after Sister and Big Clarence made their transition. Eleanor said mama could have it, because she already had a home. It lasted pretty well during all of those years.

Q Now what kind of rules and routines did your family require and what kind of chores did you have to do?

A All of them. All of the dishes and some of the washing. They had wringer washers and a couple of times I would get my hands stuck because I would always be curious to see about the roller thing and maybe as a kid I did it deliberately so some of the others would have to do that. I did a little of the ironing too. My mother was the best ironer in the world. She didn't trust us to iron much. As we grew older we would iron our own clothes. We had to do the dusting. Lots of furniture polish was used in those days. If you had bare floors, furniture polish also went on your floors. So we did all of the chores around the house. Mama paid me a penny a dandelion, which we had to get out with a dandelion weeder because cutting them does not do anything but promulgate more dandelions. I have a tool that lifts it up by the roots. The sons would do the mowing. We basically did all of the chores. We did some of the shopping that they would trust us with. The older we became, the more they trusted us to do. Then babysitting with babies in the family.

Q What kind of things did your family do together, leisure time?

A Lots of fun stuff, basically centered around the churches and the social clubs. Mama and my great aunt belonged to several clubs. One was called the Nonpariel,

the Sorosis and we had fabulous tea parties in yards where you had to dress completely up: hat, gloves, white knee socks, the whole nine yards. We didn't have pantyhose in those days. We actually had tea parties in yards. The yards were immaculate and all setup for these parties. Those were lots of fun. We had lots of fun with all of the surrounding churches. We were surrounded by Tabernacle, Hartford, John Wesley. But there are many more churches that have cropped up around there that I don't know the names of. They were all our nurturers.

We would do social things with the church. Reverend [Charles] Hill was the pastor that I remember more so from Hartford. We would come back to Hartford and dress up for Easter. We were taught social skills. I remember three mothers that were mentors in the community: Mrs. Walker, Mrs. Williams and Mrs. They nurtured us. We would do our chores, play on the playgrounds and do crafts inside. Before we could go to the playground we had to do our chores. After we did our chores we would dress up for the afternoon. Every kid on the West Side would go in the house, dress up, get clean and then go back to the playground.

I saw Leon Miller play baseball. He became a baseball icon to us. Maybe there were others that I have forgotten. We didn't know about it at the time. We would watch the ball games while they were at the field. Kronk played a very important part, too. I learned to swim at Kronk. Green Pastures played a great role. That was our first camping experience, because there were no camps for black children at that time.

I remember going back to Sampson for modern dancing, making things with our hands and becoming acquainted with

the arts and music, thanks to the ladies that guided us through those kinds of activities.

John Dancy was the head of the Detroit Urban League, which ran the Green Pastures Camp. I camped at Green Pastures from about the age of 9 until around 14 or 15. So I camped there for about the four or five years of my early childhood. I Later went back to be a counselor as an adult. Those were extremely rewarding experiences for children and those camps were free.

Q I have heard a lot about Green Pastures over the years and that they really instilled some important values.

A There is a whole history in the discussion about that camp.

Q They really emphasized black history.

A Yes.

Q Can you talk a little bit about that?

A For example, there were five cottages over the hill on the girl's side and they were all named after blacks that had contributed a lot to humanity. The camps on the girl's side were: Phyllis Wheatley, Samuel Taylor, Ira Aldridge, Crispus Attacks, and J.C. Price. On the boy's side they were Booker T, Charles Drew, Colonel Young, Frederick Douglas, and, I think, Benjamin Banneker. I always get stuck on one of those.

Now in those cabins there were 12 beds and there were two counselors assigned to each cabin. Then when monies got tight, there was one counselor and an assistant. We stayed all summer. There were eight camping trips. The

counselors taught the youngsters why the cabins were named after these persons. They had to know all about it. There was clean up every morning. There would always be some child musically inclined and whoever that person happened to be, usually it was a young boy, that person played taps. They would play reveille in the morning and you would hear, “you got to get up, you got to get up.” You would hear that and that would call us to reveille. We had to go down some steps and then line up on what we call a hill, and start off our morning with some sort of prayer, at reveille.

We had to clean up, go to the latrine. We had cold water, there was no hot water; we had to take cold water showers, wash ourselves, clean the cabin and go to breakfast. Later that was changed to go to breakfast and come back and clean the cabins. The cleanest cabin was awarded the flag.

They got to hang the flag out in front to let everybody know that their cabin was the best. Some of the cabins were quite rigid and we followed kind of a military strategy, where they could bounce the quarter. We had to have hospital corners on those little narrow beds. Children that had accidents had to proudly put evidence of their accidents in the back of the cabins so the bedwetting soon stopped when they had to show off their trophies at the back of the cabin. It was fascinating. At the end of the day there was another musician who played reveille

During the day there are a variety of activities. John Dancy and his wife were in charge of the Urban League, but they would pick a head counselor to supervise us. I remember Conklin Bray and his wife were head counselors when I was a counselor. The activities that I was in charge of was handcrafts. So we would go into the trees because we were surrounded by trees and pick the chestnuts, walnuts, or whatever we could find on the floor and string them together.

Before open house, we would make Hawaiian lei. We

would just keep the children busy. Then there was someone in charge of those that liked to give speeches and someone in charge baseball teams and other sports. When the weather was inclement and you couldn't go out, we had everybody come back to the dining hall. In the dining hall, all of the chairs and tables were put away; they were all wooden. We would have this great big humongous circus of children all around in a great big circle and they played games in there that the children taught us. We would say grace before each meal.

Now the fascinating thing occurred later and that was when the Public Law 94142 came along that stated that you couldn't warehouse children with special needs. Conway and I were counselors together. She later became Dean of English over at Cody High School. We were complaining and whining because we didn't know what to do with the children with special needs. What are we going to do with them? John Dancy heard us. So consequently we got two children with special needs and they were both visually challenged. We learned a lot from those children, particularly a girl named Juanita. We put the children, the campers through their rituals and then we would put them to bed. They would be so worn-out and tired that hopefully they would go to sleep. We actually would sleep because we would be worn out from these children. Well, late one night we heard this voice ring out and here was this kid reading a Judy Bloom book in pitch-black darkness. Who could do that, but Juanita, the blind child. We soon found out that just being visually challenged did not mean that they were totally handicapped. That was just one part of their body not behaving the way that it should. While we were saying grace, we had to close our eyes and we would sing grace according to the standards of John Dancy. When you opened your eyes your brownie would be gone, your roll

would be gone, your chicken or whatever it was that you had on your plate because Juanita had scoffed it up because she could sniff it out. She gave us quite a run for our money.

I later saw her picture on the front of Ebony; it has been about a few years ago. She was the Director of Human Resources in Cook County, Illinois. I said “that is that little brat that used to worry me to death.” I sent her a little post card. So those were some of the experiences that went on as we were growing up but I think that added greatly to the richness of the community. All of the WestSiders now met the children on the East Side, and the children on the East Side met the children from the West Side, and we all meshed together in this camp called Green Pastures. There are a lot of stories about that camp that need to be told.

Q Tell me about Sampson Elementary School. You talked about it a little but any special teachers or experiences that you had?

A Yes, my first black teacher I met at Sampson School. She was one of the Bethels that also lived on Beechwood. She was a gym teacher. We had some teachers that worked with us. One of my best memories is that auditorium and later I found out that auditorium was simply a holding place for children who were on platoon and there was no place for them to platoon to. So they all had to spend a forty-five minute period in the auditorium. These teachers actually taught us public speaking. We had to recite or sing. I heard Betty Jones do “In The Morning” by Langston Hughes. It knocked me off my feet. I never really could recite the whole thing so I would keep a little cheat sheet so I could expose the other children to it. Mrs. Grier was one of them. I can't think of it now because different teachers

would take you to the auditorium. Two in the main had us to give plays. During World War II, we had to sell or buy stamps and war bonds. So we would give plays to raise money and invite parents to see us. If you want to get parents to come to school, put on a play for them. One particular time we had Jerry Blocker playing a German and someone else playing the other roles, because that was who we were fighting at the time. Mary McQueen Cheney was playing Shina. She was coming through the so-called trees to help cut-off the Germans. We got Jerry safely locked up in the locker and we thought we had done a grand job and then we went on home. The next day when we came in, the principal asked for myself, June, Gert and someone else to come to the office. We went with great fear because you didn't get sent to the office. Your mother would come over there and spank you at the school. What we had done was we forgot to open the locker to let Jerry out. I used to tease the late Jerry Blocker about that. We never should have let you out of that locker. He went on to become famous in his own right as one of our first black broadcasters.

So those are just a few of the memories. I could go on and on about Green Pastures Camp. There is a story in that all by itself. Dancy recruited his teachers from freshmen or juniors in college. That is where he got his counselors. We had just as much fun as the children.

Q After Sampson was McMichael, is that correct?

A Yes.

Q What was that experience like?

A That was a growing up experience. We went to McMichael for just one year to get us ready for high school

and that is where I learned algebra. It gave me great frustration at first because it was our first time mixing letters with numbers. I didn't agree with that because it had never happened before. I see they have since changed that strategy. It was a great learning experience and it pushed me up a notch from elementary behavior. It was just so brief. I can't really remember a lot of anything except social life and getting ready to go to high school from McMichael. From McMichael, some of us went to Cass and some of us went to Northwestern. Those were predominately the schools that had the larger numbers of black children in Detroit because so many of the high schools were still totally white and other European mixtures and we weren't so comfortable in those communities in those days. But McMichael was just a year's experience and then from there to Northwestern.

Q We were just talking about Sampson and McMichael. I was kind of curious about these schools, they seemed to be integrated as I understood it?

A Yes, there was a little of that integration at Sampson because there was an Asian child there. We called all Asians Chinese in those days. There was Howard Yee. When I got to McMichael, there was Andy Mazuk. There were a lot of Polish people that lived across Michigan Avenue. That was sort of a racial dividing line. We used to walk with my great aunt over there to get hair supplies, because she was a milliner. I would have to take my two nieces with me that I ended up raising when my sister passed. My husband and I ended up raising our own four children and my two nieces and we were altogether as one family. You see on the West Side and maybe other parts of the town, but especially on the West Side there was a lot of families that stood together. When the older children passed,

someone was always there to pick up the baton and finish raising the children. We are still doing that, because I have a niece in particular who helped raise another niece's children. We have been doing that all of our lives.

Q Did you have much contact with the white students at Sampson and McMichael after school. What was your relationship like in school?

A No, not really. There wasn't as much of that as it appeared to be. When you got to Northwestern, there was not very much mixing. I remember playing on a hockey team and being in choirs and choruses with quite a mixture of people. I remember Andy Mazuk who sat next to me in homeroom and we always elbowed each other. The teachers never moved us. We had to sit there and fight it out. The Northwestern reunions represented that sort of racial divide. It wasn't until I guess we had been college graduates twenty years later that we saw this mixture. At high school we were kind of like the flies in the buttermilk because Northwestern was still predominately white. There were so few of us. Many of the high schools practiced kind of racist tactics. They would counsel parents to send their children to learn how to do graphs, and to get business education, and those kind of things and they would not counsel them to go to college. The parents began to object to that. I remember my parents did and Mrs. Williams and some of the others said, “no, we want the children to have college prep.” So it was still pretty much some racial divides. I remember Dominique came back and asked why we were not at the picnic. We were not invited to the picnic. We didn't know there was a high school picnic. Some of the practices still were going on.

Q How were you able to get through that?

A I think the mixtures in sports, music and the arts played a large part in that because we lived apart. Tireman divided the blacks from the whites on the West Side. There was an Orsel McGhee incident which is known in history. They were one of the first blacks to buy property across Tireman. There was quite a violent uprising that surrounded that. I remember we had a piano teacher on Tireman at 5120. That was as far as blacks could move. My great uncle would tell us stories about Tireman being a big ditch when he came to what he referred to as Michigan. I wish he were still around to tell us those stories. But he said it was a big ditch and the only blacks that crossed that line were workers in the homes over there, across on the other side of Tireman.

Warren was the same thing on the other side. It separated us from most basically Polish people on the other side. I would see it because we would walk across Warren to Epworth and cross over and buy supplies for my aunt's millinery projects. I remember coming home when I was very young and saying, “they’re eating lard sandwiches because cream cheese was unbeknownst to our household.

I think my first job was at Grace Hospital. I was 14 years old. We got jobs with what they referred to us as pantry girls. We would set the trays up and take them to the floors in old Grace Hospital, which was on John R, down from Harper Hospital. Even there, we ran into racism because there were some floors when we took the trays up to the upper levels in private PPK Sections where we were called by the N word, and told not to bring the trays into their room. So some of the social activities brought about by the things I mentioned earlier I think had an impact, but we didn't see a lot of it in high school. In fact, when I played hockey and we played Cooley and Redford, we would have to watch out for

our knees because those hockey players were literally out to get us when we came over there. We would hear the N word because It was prevalent and acceptable in society and, therefore, we had to live through that.

Q One thing I learned about you in doing a little research, you were queen of the masquerade party for the Rex and Regina Club?

A Yes.

Q Walk me through that. How did you become Queen and what was that all about?

A That was a fun time. Through Hartford Church there were a bunch of WestSiders; there were probably about eight of us. We got together and we formed a social club that lasted quite a while. The boys were reluctant to join us at first, but we were beginning to play at courting. So we acquired our share of boys, too. We had about eight boys and eight girls in and out of that club. We had the audacity, with one year of Latin, to name that club the Rex and Reginas meaning the Kings and Queens. We had a great deal of fun. I got the shock of my life when we ran for offices. We raised money, but I have forgotten the purposes that we were going to be using it for. I said there were so many attractive girls and so many fair-skinned girls, which was the standard of beauty in those days and I knew one of them was going to win. I did my share of collecting nickels and dimes and we wrapped them with adhesive tape. There was no such thing as scotch tape during this time. This was regular tape that we knew about. We wrapped them around and turned our money in. There were homeowners and there were entrepreneurs and persons that had a much better salary backing than I did. I just knew that

Shirley or Gloria or Shirley Graham was going to be the queen. So when we had the culminating affair at the Nacirema Club and they announced the winner of the queen as Jean Ernst. I said, “no, it wasn't me.” I just knew it wasn't me. I was absolutely floored that I had been picked as the queen but I was, and that sent me in to shock about voting. I never did find out how that went down; nobody ever told me. That was a welcome thing that happened to me at the ripe old age of about 16.

Q Folks got dressed up for this party.

A Oh, yes.

Q It was no small affair?

A No, it wasn't.

Q Can you tell me a little about that?

A We wore the styles that our parents allowed us to wear. There was none of the skin exposed and all of that kind of stuff. We had the hair style of whatever it was in those days. We dressed up. We wore our gloves and the whole nine yards. There is a picture about the Rex and Reginas. It is somewhere in Wayne's library. It has pretty much something to do with the West Side, but I think especially the Nacirema, which is American spelled backwards.

Q Do you know why it was or how that name came about?

A Well, the businessmen of that area and my great uncle, Clarence Searcy, was one who came out of Georgia. They would hunt and get together as businessmen. They

purchased that and established that. That was their struggle against racism that was so prevalent in the world. So instead of it being called the American, they called it the Nacirema.

Q Tell me about the Depression. This was during the time when your mother was a day worker?

A Yes.

Q It may not have been the easiest time?

A It wasn't, In fact the only ones filled with food and the easier living that we saw were the ministers in the community and the professionals in the community.

Awrey Bakeries was on Tireman at that time. They would give day old breads and things of that nature. I have a favorite story that my oldest brother, Bobby told. There were five of us. Bobby was one of the entrepreneurs of the streets. He knew all of the actors and actresses and the musicians that would come in and out of the Gotham [Hotel]. Mama was showing out for one of her church clubs, which I believe was the Nonpariel. She always had us embroidering and sewing and we had the little wheels of things and making the little things that you put up on the couches to keep them clean. She was ashamed of those packages that she had. In very big black letters they were labeled “not to be sold.” So in the cupboard she would turn them backwards so they couldn't be visually seen if anybody came in from the club meeting and went into the kitchen. We lived on 5349 Tireman, which was like a shotgun apartment. You come in to the living room and you go straight back to the kitchen and there were two bedrooms adjacent, three if you count what could be a dining room.

You could look straight back to the cupboards if you cared to. Bobby would delight when mama was having the club meetings and he called it showing off. He would delight in going back and turning those packages around so that the public could see that it said, “not to be sold.” Mama could be seen chasing him down Vancourt with a broom stick, because she didn't think that was very funny at all. I still howl at that story.

Q What comes to mind when you think of Joe Louis?

A Oh, boy, I think like many others of my age group that was a night that you stayed glued to the radio with your feet crossed. Everything was centered around the radio then, and you listened and you listened and you listened and all you wanted to hear was Louis won. All of the neighbors, everybody came flying out of the house. We were able to run all the way across the boulevard and get away with murder when Louis would win the fights. The whole City of Detroit would turn out in droves just celebrating. The ice cream stores were open. The popsicle stores were open. The iceys were on the street; it was just a great celebration.

Q What happened when he lost to Max Schnelling?

A It was like a funeral, because you were all geaked up to celebrate. It was just like a funeral when he lost. But those were the good old days when we were able to run freely through the streets and celebrate this fight and nobody worried about you being out after dark. We had to be back within a good frame of time. Those were the good old days. I can remember running all the way across West Grand Boulevard where my grandmother used to live with my aunt. She said, “how did you get over here?” “Well, we ran.” It was nothing to walk; we walked every where. Even if we

had bus fare, we would walk down Warren or walk down to Woodward and walk to the State Fair on 8 Mile and save the car fare to buy some food or pop. We were great walkers. My mother took cabs everywhere; she didn't like walking. My great aunt did, so I usually walked with her.

Q The 1943 riot, do you remember that at all?

A Yes. I remember being full of fear. I was still at Sampson. We didn't understand what was going on. The rumors that prevailed just scared us to death. All of this hatred scared us to death. It was a very sad time for children. Once again we were sequestered and we were not allowed to leave the porch, not even leave the second step. You had to be up above the second step of the porch where parents could see you. It was all a very unpleasant time to be in Detroit.

Q Did it create tensions between you and your white classmates?

A Not so much. Well, yes, I guess fear more than anything else. Remember I was at Sampson and there weren't that many white students at Sampson. Mostly Sampson was predominately black with a hint of Asians and just a few whites. The neighborhood schools reflected the community. There weren't that many whites and blacks living together.

Q Tell me about Milford Street. It seems to be fairly bustling street. What would an average Saturday look like on Milford Street?

A Let's see, an average Saturday…First of all, we would do our chores and get dressed up. We were allowed to walk Milford. There was a bustling ice cream parlor down

there. There was a dime store down there. In fact, that was one of my first jobs. There were soda fountains, candy stores and just a regular business community up and down Milford. We were allowed to walk Milford and there were very few problems until high school days when the anger of children breaking and entering and that kind of thing began to seep into that street of Milford. I remember taking shoes to be repaired or shined at the Thompson Shoe Parlor. I remember shopping at the dime store for all of my needs. When we got high school age, we had the dime store up near to Northwestern. But all of our needs were pretty much met on the Milford block. We could get mostly anything that we wanted.

Q How were your parents able to raise five children?

There were five of us. We had a lot of fun, we played a lot of card games and board games and worked a lot of puzzles. I remember the two next to me, Reggie, who just passed recently, and Sylvia, my sister and then little Clarence, my second oldest brother and then Bobby. There were five of us. The other thing that I remember about that period was sitting up and not being able to work the puzzle, with Sylvia and Reggie. That would anger me so much that I would sneak a piece in my pocket and say, “I am going to spend the night with Sister and take that piece of puzzle home with me.” Well, they caught on to it and so they put a stop to it. They marched right over there and got me and made me bring the puzzle piece back.

I also remember during that period that we didn't go picnicking very much. There was an Elizabeth Park and there was a Cass Park. The other parks later became a part of the larger Metropolitan system. On Saturdays and some Sundays and special holidays we used to go for a long

drive out to these parks to picnic and enjoy ourselves. The brothers and sisters and I would play cards and work dominoes; we had card games going all the time. I remember pitty-pat in the kitchen and even the paperboys that sold papers in the neighborhood would come in and take a hand. Later years as we grew older and became young adults, we played bridge together. We did a lot of bridge playing together and everybody that came to the house could take a hand in bridge.

Big Clarence had poker games at his house. So I didn't participate in that. That didn't mean that I couldn't play. I played in college for cigarettes. They thought I thought I was above the game of poker. I would watch and learn by being around them. Our favorite family game was bridge. We played very good bridge together.

Q What was it about this community that nurtured this kind of ambition, especially given the hard times that many of you lived in?

A I can give you a pretty good example. I first learned how to play ping pong at the [Reverend and Mrs.] Hill's house. Their basement was a rec room. They had a big family. They got to be very prominent contributors to Detroit in their own right. That is where I learn how to play ping pong. Many of the minister's opened up their homes to us in this way and that nurtured us. In the neighborhood, you knew everybody. You knew everybody that lived on both sides of the street that would tell on you if you erred. They would say, “what are you doing all the way over here, I am going to tell your mother when I see her.” We would walk down the street all dolled up in the afternoon and go to the tea parties and that kind of thing that I mentioned before. It was a very nurturing community. We knew one another.

Now it seems that we are such a nonintimate community; we are a stranger community. We are up North and we don't know each other and we don't trust each other. I hate to see the demise of that togetherness that used to be in the West Side. We could walk for blocks, and we would know people all along. People stayed in those newly bought homes; that was another factor. I don't know all of the dimensions of the community that nurtured me, but I certainly miss them for my own children's sake. They didn't get to go to these parties in the yards of others and get all dressed up and spend time in the neighbor's rec room. Many of us do that now as family. For example, Monday, it will be a cookout here and the whole family will rally around again. That kind of togetherness we try to maintain still.

Q It seems as though segregation, as horrible as it was, required you guys to provide a close knit kind of neighborhood and community; am I right about that?

A Yes, I think you are. As we grew through K-12 together and then before we became full adults and went our separate ways, we knew each other every place we went. We could leave the West Side and go to a little place called Club Sudan, which was over on the Lower East Side near downtown and we would go there and dance and meet people from all over the city. It was still predominantly black, and the circles became stranger related all over again. It was East Side-West Side in some instances. We had that kind of dimension that we had to fight against as well.

Q What kind of values did you bring from the West Side growing up to what you are doing now?

A I would think family first and then neighbors second. Usually everyone being here we have been here over 32

years. Usually when a new neighbor moved in, in my family, mother would take a lemon pie which she was great with, or Sister would bake rolls for the neighbor. I still follow that. I take a loaf of bread after I learned how to bake bread. I graduated from rolls to bread. I think anything that you can do to build a tightness with the relationship, tighten up your relationship with your neighbors. Family first, then neighbors. So that you look out for one another. So if you see strangers walking around, you know they are strangers. When you stay so close and you don't develop those relationships you miss out on a lot. When people passed in our family, this house was filled with people, West Side, East Side, all around that knew my husband. You could hear his voice cheering West Side Cubs or whoever our grandchildren now were playing with. You could hear him for miles around. They knew Mayfield's voice. You don't see that unless you cultivate it in your community. I think it begins with your community. It begins with your family and then you go from there. If I could say anything that would be more meaningful, it would be just stick together. You will have differences, family and community. You have to solve them instead of perpetuateing them. I don't have any magic answer but we have a strong family.

I was recently given the opportunity of a free Mother's Day and birthday trip to North Carolina from one of the nieces I raised to see her daughter graduate from North Carolina State in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina. That was just an immense historic thing for us. We took pictures. We watched the graduation. I got sunburned. The graduation was outdoors. Those kind of things that cross generations are important to me now. I think they might have always been important. I might have ducked it when I was a youngster, but I think it is important to cross the generations, too.

Q What do you tell your children about the West Side?

A Well, they listen and they don't listen because as children are they are going to have their own growing values. I tell them how we used to go from door to door during Halloween we didn't leave our community. We stayed in the block and went trick or treating, because that is where we were and we were not allowed to leave the block and go trick or treating. They know a lot about the West Side because we sat around the table and talked about it. They hear these stories at cookouts. Most of the cookouts in our family we hold here except for the 4th of July. That is my emancipation day and I usually go down to the jazz concert or whatever is going on at Hart Plaza. They come together as family all of the holidays here. I have a tendency to like to do that the day before so they are not forced to come if they have some other things to do on the holiday. We have been doing a lot of that, and I think that keeps family together. They get to see the new children, the new babies and they get to see the elders as well and hear the stories that we tell. We sit around the dining room table and tell jokes and the children have to perform to get a gift out of the dollar store Santa Bag at Christmas. Nobody misses it, not even the adults. So the dollar store santa bag has become a tradition now. They have gotten organized and so the girls will get up and do a Brittany Spears or something and the fellows will do whatever they want to do. If they reach in, they have to perform to get a gift out of it. So things like that. We continue to add. The younger people come up with their own ideas. Then we can back up then we don't have to be directing them anymore. We let the younger people direct the younger people. They kind of look forward to that I think.