AMW: This is an interview of Bill Marsh on November 17, 2015. Uh, first question for Bill. Um, when and where were you born?

WM: Seven. First of all, I was William—

AMW: William?

WM: Yes. William David Marsh. August 29, 1947. Providence Hospital, Detroit, Michigan.

AMW: In Detroit. Can you tell me a little bit about your childhood?

WM: Uh. My father left when I was a young boy, which was very formative for me, I think, because I had to step up and be self-sufficient. My mother was a single parent back in the day when it wasn't accepted. She was divorced. She supported the family. Taught me a lot of good, good things. She was Minoru Yamasaki's personal secretary and so I think I picked up some of the love of architecture from that. And uh—

AMW: Brothers and sisters?

WM: One, uh, older sister and one younger sister, yeah. Went to Shrine of the Little Flower grade school—

AMW: In?

WM: Royal Oak—

AMW: Royal Oak?

WM: Michigan. Served mass for Father Coughlin, which all of the historians will know.

AMW: Yeah that's exciting.

WM: I used to listen to his preaching and think it was boring.

AMW: Did you?

WM: Now I buy, now I've got all of his books and I think it's great. (laughs) But anyway, that's the way it was.

AMW: And where, did you go to Shrine High School too?

WM: No, my teacher wouldn't let me go there. My, my nun. She sent me to U of D High School, University of Detroit High School.

AMW: And why wouldn't she let you go there?

WM: Because I didn't have a father and I was a little outside the box.

AMW: (both laugh) She thought you needed more discipline?

WM: I guess so yeah.

AMW: (laughs) And did you like U of D High School?

WM: I hated it.

AMW: Did you?

WM: Because they were disciplinarians. I started off with it very well and I barely got out of there. You know, but I was a, I was rebellious at that time.

AMW: It's an all boys school, right?

WM: Oh yeah. All boys, Jesuit priests, very strict, very, very academic.

AMW: And so where did you go to college?

WM: Western Michigan. One thing I should mention about U of D High. You know, I did resist it, but they did brainwash you. And their motto is "Men for Others" and I never really appreciated it until I started putting all of this together and thought well maybe that's part of where, cause, I, you know, it really is important where you come from to where you end up. And it's just kind of a combination of all those things.

AMW: And so you think the training you had at U of D—

WM: Oh, no question about it—

AMW: Had a tremendous influence on you?

WM: No question about it. And all of the people I still see on a daily basis, or not daily but, you know, frequently, are from U of D High. Yeah, people, relationships, that I made there.

AMW: Um. Okay. So you went to Western?

WM: Western Michigan. Well first, I, like I say, I barely made it out of U of D (Wambeke laughs) so, I mean, literally. And so, I went to Oakland Community

College. I had moved in with my grandmother, I had moved out of the house when I was about fifteen and moved in with my grandmother, in the basement. And—

AMW: Why?

WM: Oh I was rebellious. Okay.

AMW: Wanted to be independent?

WM: No, I don't know if that was it. (both laugh) I just didn't take structure very well, I can tell you that. But, anyway, so I went to, to OCC and blossomed because of my training at U of D High. You know, I mean, it was a piece of cake, honestly, because they were using, they were using some of the same textbooks that I had at U of D and which was crazy. So then, anyway, I transferred up to Western and took, I majored in business and prelaw and took every, every real estate course, and business course and law course that they had.

AMW: So you were already developing your interests?

WM: Yeah, yeah, and while I was at Western, I got my first lesson in real estate. Which was a friend of mine. He was in the business school with me and he'd come to school every day with a three-piece suit and a briefcase, and I was in cut-off jeans and sandals. And he, I knew he was working for a real estate company and so I said to him if you ever run into a good deal, I just sold my motorcycle and I got a little cash and he said, oh my god, do I have a deal for you. Put his brief case down and flipped it open, dudududududud [calculator sound], pulls out a file. He says this is such a good deal I'll go in on it with you. Really. Great, how much do we need? He says sixteen hundred dollars down and you put up eight and I'll put up eight, and I said fine, that's about what I got. I got, cause I just sold, I got about fifteen hundred. So we get to the closing and he's the agent and we get to the closing and he's, oh the day before the closing he says, oh Bill, I got a little problem. My wife's pregnant and we just found out she is going to have twins and I got to pay the doctor bill. Can I borrow the eight hundred from you? (Wambeke laughs) I said sure, yeah, why not, you know you brought the deal to me. So we go to the closing. I am the only one paying any money. He's getting paid a commission, he owns half the house, I move in, I fix it up and when we sell it he gets half the profit. And, oh, by the way, he pays me my eight hundred back with no interest. (both laugh) So I just thought that was an invaluable lesson.

AMW: Really, that's a life lesson for you, yeah.

WM: You know, I'm a nineteen-year-old kid going "what, what just happened?" I think it was good but I'm not sure. So anyway, then I got my real estate license while I was up there and sold real estate up there and graduated from Western with a business degree.

AMW: And then?

WM: And then my grandmother always wanted me to go to law school, so I went to law school. I enrolled at Wayne. And I figured, you know, the reason, one of the reasons I did that housing thing up at Western, I bought this little three family, this little, junky place.

AMW: This was the one you did with your friend?

WM: Yeah, was because I had to pay my own way and this was a good way to live, I thought. I got free rent for running the show and made a little appreciation. So that was another good lesson, it really was. It was invaluable. So when, after I was accepted at Wayne Law School, I started looking around Wayne for a place to buy and I found a building on Fourth Street, where I showed you, 5850 Fourth Street, and it was a six family brick and there was a guy in there working on it and I went in and started talking to him and asked him what he was doing. He said well, why are you interested in this spot? I'm thinking of buying a house. You know who owns it. He said, no, but I am stealing all the radiators right now so get out of here. (laughs)

AMW: (laughs) Another life lesson.

WM: So, I don't know, somehow or another I got his information and was able to buy the thing from this dentist who was, they were literally putting the boards on the building and they were stripping it. And I got ahold of radiator guy and paid him to put all of the radiators back in (both laugh) and a boiler. And then I started fixing it up and found it very, very, very easy to rent because of my connections at the law school. I had all these friends that were going to law school so I rented it all to lawyers, or law students, and because it was right across the hill from the law school, you know, was about as close to the law school as you can get, really, as far as living. It was a neat little street. So then—

AMW: What year was this?

WM: That would have been 1969.

AMW: Okay.

WM: And then, I transfer—So then after, as I told you this story when you're in law school as you know, they tell you to look right, look left, those people aren't going to be here when you graduate. And so I just got up and left then. I just figured I'm not going to put in my time.

AMW: (laughs) Why spend all that money and time?

WM: I don't know what a tort is. So, and I figured and my goal was to be a real estate guy because that's—But it seemed to me that all the successful real estate people in

the sixties were lawyers. And, that's just the way it was. So, but I figured I had enough experience and enough, you know, there was the demand. And I was able to buy a couple more properties next door, around the corner, that kind of thing, and they were, it was a matter of just keeping them full. So I transferred, I got a, I transferred my real estate license out to B. F. Chamberlain in Royal Oak and I reverse commuted to Royal Oak and lived on Fourth Street in Detroit. And, then, oh while I was at U of D High School, actually in the summer, the summer of eighth grade, I met my future wife, which was Karen Rieden.

AMW: Could you spell her last name?

WM: R-i-e-d-e-n. And she's a Detroit person. She lived in Detroit her whole life—and Six Mile and Livernois area.

AMW: So you met her in the summer of eighth grade before you started high school?

WM: Correct. Correct. And a little on and off, we dated on and off, that kind of thing. So anyway, we ended up getting married in November 13, 1980.

AMW: 1980?

WM: '70. She'd kill me. (both laugh) She'd kill me. That's why I've got notes, see, I need my notes. (both laugh) So let me make sure I didn't miss anything here. (both laugh) So yeah, I was out in Royal Oak at Chamberlain and I was this hot shot salesman, you know, and they had about fifty people there and I was the number two producer my first year out.

AMW: Wow.

WM: Yeah. I was cranking. And I was not going to be the number one because he was crazy. He lived, you know, that's all he did. But the reason I tell you that is because when we got married, we decided that this was going to be our only honeymoon. So we took six weeks off. She was an x-ray technician over at the DMC and we took six weeks off and had a drive away out to California, and then went down to Mexico and, you know, just did it on the cheap, but we had time. That was another great life lesson. To take the time and do it. And, while we were gone, I did not shave so, and that was back in the day, that was 1970 so that was, you know, people were growing moustaches and sideburns.

AMW: It was kind of normal, yeah.

WM: Kind of normal, but at B. F. Chamberlain it wasn't normal and so I came back from this long honeymoon, walked into my manager's office. And I had bought a new suit, I had a new suit on, got the beard trimmed real close and said are you ok with the beard and he said yeah I'm OK with the beard. No problem. Welcome back. Let's

get to work. So we went downstairs for the Monday morning meeting and the big guy was there, B. F., and he said tell the kid with the beard he's got to lose the beard. (Wambeke laughs) And so I came home that night, my first night, first night back to work, tell my wife I lost my job or I got, I got to shave off the beard. I didn't tell her, I said I got to shave off the beard. She says why. I said for work. She says to hell with it. I got a job. I'll support you. Yes!

AMW: (both laugh) So you're both mavericks, kind of?

WM: (both laugh) So you notice I still have the beard. Its never been shaved.

AMW: So you left?

WM: Yeah, oh yeah. I went back in and gave my notice. I didn't give my notice, I just picked up my stuff and left. They did call me months later and asked me to come back. They changed the rules.

AMW: Well yeah, they missed you. You're the big seller.

WM: And I'm sitting in my office in my world headquarters. Renaissance Investment Company on Fourth Street in our spare bedroom. (both laugh) So I'm really busy. I really can't come back. Right, I was dying. But anyway—

AMW: So was that when you formed your own company, at that point?

WM: Yeah, yes, actually the first one was Homegrown Management Company, which was really kind of corny. But, anyway, in 1972 I formed Renaissance Investment Company and it was a brokerage business so I would sell for other people. I would list and sell houses, like on West Canfield, and then I'd also buy properties as I could. As I'd make enough money to have a little down payment I'd buy properties because they were giving them away, they were just giving them away, literally. I mean, you just, you know, if you had decent credit, a thousand dollars, you could buy whatever.

AMW: Was this true everywhere or just in this area?

WM: Oh yeah, but this area was the worst.

AMW: So describe the Cass Corridor in 1969.

WM: Uh drugs, prostitution, bars, students, hippies, counterculture, you know, John Sinclair.

AMW: Did you meet John Sinclair?

WM: No, no I was busy trying to make money.

AMW: You were making money. You were a capitalist. (both laugh)

WM: I was a capitalist. I wasn't hanging around with those guys. I just happened to have a beard. (both laugh) But it was, yeah, it was pretty rough. It was, it got worse. You know, I think some of our politicians ran it, ran the city into the ground to be honest with you. I witnessed it. It was bad. And we—

AMW: Do you think this area was worse than other areas of Detroit or representative?

WM: This was where all the drugs and prostitution was.

AMW: Oh okay.

WM: Yeah, yeah, this was where it was all pushed. This was where all the social service agencies were. All the homeless shelters. All the rehab, drug rehab. All the alcohol rehab. All the prostitute bars. All the, you know, I mean, one stop shop. What do you need? You know, it was one of those places. But on the other hand there were also, also some very good people that came in and, and a, a lot of it was because of Wayne, Wayne State University, people that were affiliated with Wayne were interested in what was going on. And I was, I became interested in historic preservation. And uh then, one of the turning points was when I met, well I met two people, Ken Davies and Beulah Groehn Croxford, and they were on West Canfield between Second and Third and he had one of the Victorian houses and she had just moved in from Franklin actually for, and bought another one. She came to a garage sale. It's kind of a cute story. She came to a garage sale and bought the house. Yeah. In 1965 and then of course the riots came and everything changed and it got really bad. It, but this area was not affected by the riots, I want to say. I think that's really kind of interesting.

AMW: Yeah, that is interesting.

WM: There was no, because they were further out and this was a, this was a very integrated area. You know, there were, everybody was here, you know, Asians, and blacks, whites, you know, you name it. The common denominator—

AMW: All ages?

WM: All ages. Yeah. Yeah. The common denominator was the University and the Medical Center.

AMW: Oh, the Medical Center was here even then in some form?

WM: Harper Hospital's been here since the 1800s.

AMW: Oh wow.

WM: It was, so there's a whole series of hospitals over there. So one of the things by the way, when I was getting my education one of the things that I learned was the theory of concentric decay. You know what that is?

AMW: No. Could you explain it?

WM: Well cities are born and grow out from the center and they die from the center, and the decay goes out.

AMW: Oh, okay.

WM: And if you look for most cities it's true. In our city it was a little different because of the river, so it couldn't go to the south at all.

AMW: Right.

WM: But it did clearly go up north. And if you look at the housing stock you can tell. You know, because like these big Victorians that were lined along Woodward Avenue or down Brush Park, down Canfield, that was the ultimate, those were, I mean those were the richest—

AMW: Oh, they're gorgeous, yeah.

WM: The Ferrys and the Whitneys and all these real phenomenal places. So and then, you know, then, as time went on they moved further out, they moved out to Palmer Park and then to Bloomfield Hills. And then the lakes and in the meantime the houses that they left behind were cut up into rooming houses, basically, particularly after the war, and because there was a housing shortage. And they just, uh, were very low income. And, you know, people had bad, some bad habits. Different and really kind of anything went. The one thing I'd say about the Cass Corridor back then is that there were no rules. I mean, it was like the wild west. It was crazy. It was crazy. Buy anything you want. Do anything you want. There was some police protection, but not a lot, not a lot. But what there was, was from Wayne State University. And they had, they had a really good police force and still do. They're probably the single biggest reason why the area has maintained itself, no question in my mind. Because it's safe. It's always been relatively safe.

AMW: And that's key to you? You think that's—

WM: Absolutely.

AMW: Critical to development?

WM: Absolutely.

AMW: Is safety?

WM: Well location number one okay, because, again, the concentric theory of decay, so the decay is going out. You've got these major anchors, Wayne State University, Detroit Medical Center, uh the Henry Ford Hospital and then the Central Business District, Masonic Temple, you know Orchestra Hall and, you know, some real, real major anchors, although a lot of them went through a lot of problems back in that, those times. But, you know, when I'm sitting up in my classroom as an, as a academia and thinking, well gee, where would be a great place to go, Cass Corridor looks like it. I mean, we just had the riots, and we got all this housing stock and—

AMW: It's affordable?

WM: It's cheap.

AMW: There's people that will live there?

WM: They're, they're, they're giving it away. All you had to do was manage it. So that's what I did.

AMW: You—What fascinates me about you as I was doing my reading is that you managed to combine your business with your activism. So you, you made money, it sounds like, but you helped the community as well.

WM: I always thought of myself as a benevolent, benevolent capitalist. You know, I could chose my charities, that's what I always believed, and, you know, well and I should also tell you one other very important thing was we had a ten-year plan, my wife and I did. And, uh, we made a commitment to live and immerse ourselves here for ten years. So November 13 of 1980, which is why I stumbled on that, was our retirement date. And we were going to just stop and do whatever, whatever level we were at, whatever that is because it's all relative—

AMW: Right. Right. So you'd take stock at that point.

WM: Yeah, take stock. Our intention frankly, was to, my intention was to travel around the world, and just backpack around the world or whatever, do whatever. You know. Just take. But for those ten years we, we ate, breathed, and lived the neighborhood, the real estate, and eventually our kids. And so for ten years we were here and we lived in three different Victorian, well after Fourth Street, lived in two different Victorian houses, I think I showed you, 4470 Second and 3977 Second, and restored them and we really enjoyed it. But then when the kids were in, school aged, we had our son in Waldorf. But, which was good but it, there was nobody to play with and—

AMW: Could you talk about Waldorf a little bit?

WM: How familiar are you with it?

AMW: I am not familiar with it at all. Is it a local elementary school; is it a private school?

WM: It's a private school in Indian Village. And there were only two of them in the United States at that, at that, time. One was in San Francisco and one was here. A fellow named Steiner, I want to say, founded it. He was German. And it was kind of like a total immersion theory where they, they had fifteen, his theory was that the kids learn for fifteen minutes and then they're bored. So he would give them fifteen minutes of writing, but they had a theme that carried through everything. They'd, so they'd be writing about flowers, let's say. Then they'd have fifteen minutes of Spanish and they'd learn to say flower in Spanish. And then they'd have fifteen minutes of art, and they'd draw flowers. Yeah, so there was a continuity through the whole thing. But it wasn't the three Rs (laughs) okay, it was more outside the box. And, if you stayed in it the whole time period that goes for twelve years, you have a very well rounded liberal arts education but we could see that it wasn't working exactly right because there was no, we were commuting to Indian Village from the Cass Corridor. There was no playmates. There was no, you know, he was playing with street urchins. You know, so one day my wife told me she was moving and if I wanted to come I would be welcome. (both laugh)

AMW: So when were your children born?

WM: Uh our son Peter was born September 5th of '74, Paul was born in April of '76 and Maggie or Margaret was born in November of '80 and so when we moved out to the suburbs, Peter and Paul were two, two and one, two and, two and, no excuse me three and five, six.

AMW: So did you, when you took stock in 1980, was that when you moved out to the suburbs?

WM: Yes. Partially uh because my wife was pregnant with Maggie. And Maggie was born November 24, 1980, and so on November 13 of 1980 well we knew that there was something coming. (both laugh) You know, so I guess we're not backpacking around the world.

AMW: No. Not with three children.

WM: (both laugh) So that was that. And so then we got them, we put them in school out in the suburbs, you know, and it was the best thing for them. No question about it. But during those ten years, we were really immersed in what was going on here and so during that time I met, as I said, Ken Davies and Beulah Croxford Groehn [middle and last names transposed by Marsh] and they had just gotten West Canfield historic district founded as a national historic site.

AMW: In what year?

WM: Uh, yeah, I'd have to look that up to be honest with you.

AMW: Midsixties, do you think?

WM: Late sixties, very late sixties, early seventies. But there was a real estate developer named Bernie Linden that had bought up the whole north side of the block, bought all Victorian houses, which were really rough. They were really tired and he bought it as a bulk sale and he was going to tear them all down and build low income housing. And Beulah was just nuts about it. She said, so she called me and said Bill, we got to stop him, we've got to do something. We've got to fight, protest, picket. I said, well, let me call. So I called him and said how would you like to double your money? And he said what are you talking about. I said well you're fighting with this neighborhood, which I'm part of, and you're going to lose and if you let me sell these properties one at a time I can sell them for twice what you paid for them. I know what you paid for them. So he said great, let's do it. So I put them on the market and listed them as the broker, and sold for the princely sum of between eighteen and twenty five thousand dollars and now, there, there haven't been any sales lately because nobody wants to sell, but they are over two hundred fifty thousand dollars easy.

AMW: Over two hundred fifty thousand?

WM: Over that, easy. I, you'd be hard pressed to find someone to sell them for under that, for that. They don't want to sell them. They are just priceless. They really are. Well you go to any other major metropolitan area in the world. And that was my other thought, you know, I mean, I've been, I've travelled around and you see what's going on in other cities and it was like, happening big time, but I just figured it was going to happen here, and I really thought it was going to happen in ten years, I really did. (laughs) Maybe twenty, I don't know, but not forty or fifty. But anyway—

AMW: Why do you think it took so long?

WM: Racism. Yeah. No question. Both ways.

AMW: And you think that's worse here than other cities?

WM: It was then. Now it's worked itself out. Now I think we are in a better position than other cities. But there was reverse racism against whites. There was white racism against blacks. Yeah. I'm not talking about this specific little area, but the city as a whole.

AMW: The city of Detroit.

WM: And what caused it to come under such stress, that and the failure of the schools, the Detroit Public Schools, as far as I'm concerned. They should just shut it down. Because we got to find a different way of doing it. It's obviously broken. But anyway, that's off the point. So, we were able to get owner-occupants into all these houses, which is the other key, I think, for this area is I really focused on getting owner occupants because people care more about their properties when they're owners, when they're occupying the property. And even the apartment buildings, which there are a lot of apartment buildings, if the owner lived in the neighborhood, he'd take, she'd take a lot better care of the apartment building, you know, they're walking by it everyday or whatever. You know the other thing, the area was really, really relatively walkable, and that was one of our goals too, was to make it walkable. Which means it has to be safe.

AMW: Right. And you mentioned that the Wayne State Police were very instrumental in that. What about the Detroit Police? Were they, did they, did Wayne State and the Detroit Police Department work together or—

WM: Yes, but Detroit Police was always under crisis. They were, they were, they were putting, putting out fires, so to speak. It was very difficult for them to do proactive policing, or community policing as they called it. There was a dysfunction between a lot of the different agencies, uh, so—

AMW: So what were some of the other projects that you were involved in in the time that you, like I, the West Canfield project was a big one? Were there other projects you were involved in as well?

WM: Real estate or community?

AMW: Let's start with real estate and then go to community.

WM: Okay.

AMW: Because once again, I think that's the marriage of your business and your activism that's really interesting.

WM: Right. Right. Well yeah, I was very active in real estate. I probably bought and sold somewhere between fifty and a hundred buildings, major apartment buildings. These were anywhere from two-family to the biggest one was a hundred units and then we managed them. That was key. You have to manage these things. (laughs)

AMW: Right. Right.

WM: And I focused my energies on Prentis between Second and Third and the reason was because it had West Canfield on the south, which I knew had all these owner occupants and they weren't going to let anything happen and then you had Wayne State on the north which wasn't going to let anything bad, terrible happen

and I was able to come in there in the early seventies and you could buy apartment buildings, the least I ever paid was a thousand a unit and the most I ever paid was five, six thousand, whereas today they're thirty thousand a unit or more, more really. And again, same thing, you can't get people to sell today because they understand what they've got. They've got demand, they've got good quality properties and you just put in new systems and they'll be good for another hundred years.

AMW: What happened, by late seventies the economy was just going downhill everywhere. How did that affect your business?

WM: We still did okay. At about that time, I had started to do condo conversions in the Cass Corridor, which is really kind of an off the wall thing, when you think about it.

AMW: Explain what that is?

WM: Well what I do is I take an apartment building and some of them, most of them had been cut up into more units, somewhere between two and four more units than they were originally. So for instance, I bought a forty-four unit apartment building for two thousand dollars a unit, and so eighty eight thousand dollars with two thousand dollars down I want to say, or something like that. I mean, it's just, the leverage was ridiculous.

AMW: Yeah, unbelievable.

WM: I was willing to take on all this debt. So, and then I put money into it and converted it back to eleven townhouses, and sold them off as individual townhouses for between twenty-five and forty-five thousand and to owner occupants.

AMW: Oh okay.

WM: And that was in 1979, I want to say, '78, and some of the people that bought there then are still there.

AMW: Oh wow.

WM: Still there. That's a long time. And then—

AMW: So they're invested in the community?

WM: Oh yeah. There were a lot of people. And then I did a few more condos. That was number, when I took the permit out for the Second Avenue Terraces condominium conversion it was only the thirteenth condominium conversion in the city of Detroit, history of the city of Detroit.

AMW: That's amazing.

WM: Isn't that ridiculous? And then I did the Charles at 4202 Second, I did 469 West Willis, and we did 476 Prentice, and we did 459 West Canfield, so I bought, I don't know how many units it was, fifteen or sixteen units of owner occupancy. But, well to answer your question, so yes, times were tough, financing was ridiculous.

AMW: Interest rates were exorbitant right?

WM: Right. So I, I always continued my education. And I took a lot of classes in creative finance, 1031 exchanges. You're a tax lawyer—

AMW: I am but—

WM: So you know about 1031 exchanges, okay.

AMW: Do you want to explain them? Real basically?

WM: Real basic, you just, you can postpone your gain, your taxable gain on your sale if you trade up and don't decrease your debt, bottom line, right? How'd I do?

AMW: Good.

WM: (laughs) That's a nutshell. But, so I did a lot of 1031s because they work. And then when we sold these condos, people would be coming in from the suburbs, I'd take their house in as a down payment. You know, they'd owe money on it and a lot of people didn't have any equity. But I'd take their house. I had people come, give me a house in Birmingham for a condo in the Cass Corridor. A woman from Plymouth, I had one, one women that gave me a farm up in Manistee, another one gave me two old model Ts. You know, I mean, I was pretty much—

AMW: It was very creative.

WM: I was pretty much a survivor. I had to survive. I didn't have a choice. You know, I mean, I was dying, but we were able to do it. And then you asked about the, so that, that's kind of what I was doing then. And, I started at the community level.

AMW: Do you consider yourself an activist?

WM: Well no, I never did, no, until you called me one. You called me a dirty name. (both laugh) No I never did, I never did.

AMW: No? Why didn't you?

WM: But now that I've reflected on this—

AMW: You just considered yourself a business person?

WM: I was a capitalist. I was self serving. I was doing good, what, how's that saying doing well, but, doing good by doing well. That's the way I always figured it. And I always said I'd choose my charities. You know, I wasn't a bleeding heart liberal at all. I was—I'm not a Republican, I'm not a Democrat, but I'm a free thinker. That's what I would call myself. I really do. But I did not think of myself as an activist, no. But I did—

AMW: But you, but you recognized that you were surrounded by activists, right?

WM: Umhm.

AMW: For example, you knew Beulah was an activist, you knew Ken was an activist, right?

WM: Right, right.

AMW: But you didn't put yourself in that category?

WM: I was a capitalist. It was tough being an activist when you're a capitalist. (Wambeke laughs) But I did get involved in some of these things like the earliest one was PADCO, People's Area Development Corporation. Back in the late sixties after the riots they set this up, federal government did, and so I went to some of these meetings and they came up with these grandiose plans and all these people were always fighting about the minutiae and in the meantime Rome was burning, right, and I mean you can't, you can't walk outside the meeting because you are going to get robbed or raped. You know, and they're talking about whether they are going to build a twelve-story building or a fourteen-story building when that's all pie in the sky crap anyway.

AMW: Was this the federal government?

WM: Yes. And then I found out these people were getting paid to come to these meetings. (both laugh)

AMW: Not you, right?

WM: (both laugh) There's something wrong with this picture.

AMW: Exactly.

WM: So then a group of us formed the four Cs, which is the Concerned Citizens of Cass Corridor. And that was in the early seventies. And a fellow by the name of Lou Redmond was the chair. It was really his idea. He was a, he was a, a liberal activist in the truest sense of the word and he was a minister of a church, a Methodist church,

at the corner of Selden and Second, Selden and Cass, and he saw first hand what was going on, and the kids, the way the kids were deteriorating, the way the, you know, he'd see these thirteen year old girls turn into prostitution, these young boys going on drugs. In fact his son was murdered on the next corner. The Redmond Park was named after his son—right next to the Selden Standard. They just redid the park. And, so anyway, we set it up and we had, eh, housing committee and social services committee and planning and development committee and, you know, all these committees and again everybody kind of got hung up on the minutiae, you know. They were all very well meaning, good people and they were all my neighbors. I mean they all lived here, but when you really get down to it, everybody had a different agenda. And nobody wanted to gore their ox, you know, and then they all had their, my father in law said if you give them too much money, if you give away too much money the pigs will have their front feet in the trough (both laugh) and—

AMW: It's true.

WM: That's what I saw. Yeah and we got into a big battle about housing, whether it should be low income housing or market rate housing and I tried to make a compromise. I'm a kind of compromising kind of guy and that's, I can make a deal.

AMW: It's the way to get things done.

WM: And so I suggested we make it fifty-fifty or sixty-forty but people didn't buy that, okay. So its kind of interesting, because some of the players that were involved then— this is a good historical fact, I think, like Bob Slattery was one of them. And so Bob said the hell with, heck with you guys and he went out and formed his own development company, Midtown Development, and he developed a number of properties in the area and did a real good job of it. In fact the Willys Loft is responsible for him and Stuber-Stone Lofts and a number of properties, but he did it on, as kind of as an offshoot. Then Joel Landy, another character, I mean really a great guy, he went down and developed Peterboro and Charlotte between Woodward and Cass and lived there and fought the battles. But, you know, he was again one of the four Cs people, but did not agree with the low-income housing. Then there was Pat Dorn, who did agree with the low-income housing, who formed the Cass Corridor Neighborhood Development Corporation, which is still in existence today, and he's been very successful in not only renovating existing housing but also building new housing. He built that entire block between Brainard and Brainard and Selden, was it, and Third and Second, and all brand new. And he's done a number of buildings and he's spent millions and millions and millions and millions of, did I say taxpayers' dollars?

AMW: No you didn't. (laughs)

WM: And has been able to offer these properties subsidized so that people only pay twenty-five percent of their gross adjusted income, which is fine, which is good, you know. There's a need for it. But I think you need balance. So, it was really kind of

interesting to me how the battle at the four Cs turned out to be won by everybody, you know, on the housing department at least. And I was the chair of the planning development, I think it was. So yeah after seeing all this go on, I came to the conclusion that there was only two common denominators among all these people, all these liberals and conservatives. We didn't have a lot of conservatives, but activists and capitalists, or if you want to call them socialists, do-gooders, whatever they are. There were two common denominators. Not greed and fear, but clean and safe. Everybody wants it clean, everybody wants it safe. And if they can't agree on that, they shouldn't be here.

AMW: Right, right.

WM: So on our next rendition, which was a group that started out as the Second Boulevard Businessmen's Association, which Mario Lelli was the president. We made him president because everybody knew Mario. And then we found out it wasn't politically correct to be the businessmen's association. Although Beulah was part of that and she picked the name, I think. Uh so then we changed it to Business, Second, no we changed it to Midtown Community and Business Alliance and then that evolved. Christina Lovio-George, she's got a PR firm, she changed that to the Midtown Alliance and what that was, was—

AMW: What years are we talking about now?

WM: Let's see. I might have jumped forward a tad here.

AMW: That's okay.

WM: Bububububumbumbum. That was 1989.

AMW: Okay. So Midtown Alliance, came about, that iteration, in 1989.

WM: Yes. But in the meantime, I guess I skipped forward to '89. Let me just fill in the blanks just a tad, okay?

AMW: Okay.

WM: Um another, so we moved to the suburbs in '80. We knew my son had, had to have open-heart surgery and that was one of the reasons why we moved as well.

AMW: And how old was he?

WM: He was three and a half. And unfortunately he did not make it. He passed away on February 16, 1981 and that was a tough time for me.

AMW: I bet.

WM: It was a tough economy. Uh kind of made me reexamine my priorities and uh got involved with the Children's Center at that time because of that. Okay. And uh then kept going to school, kept getting an education, all about real estate, got a certified Property Manager Designation, got a Certified Commercial Investment Manager designation. There are only two in the state of Michigan, I might add, myself and Jerry Schostak, who just passed away. And he was a little more public than I was.

AMW: (both laugh) I've heard his name, yeah.

WM: Major. Major. Uh and I learned to keep my head down and not take the bullets. I kept under the radar and didn't want the press. Didn't want the—We got press early on but it just never did anything for me and, it really, I thought it was counterproductive, frankly. I just didn't want it. But, so anyway, went about my business.

AMW: So by this point you're living in the suburbs, but you're still working here?

WM: Oh yeah, Oh yeah.

AMW: In the Cass Corridor?

WM: Definitely. Yes. That's basically all I ever did, as far as work. I mean I've traded properties into other states all over the country but basically all my, my work was here. Uh you know we raised our kids during the eighties. My son became an eagle scout. My daughter was a star. You know, they're really great kids. My wife's great. But the economy was terrible. Uh you know we had some personal challenges. The neighborhood was going downhill because of all this was really, really bad. We weren't getting police protection. You know Wayne State did, only went to a certain point, really, and that point was kind of nebulous frankly. I think it was really Forest, which is just north of Canfield. But they would come to Canfield but they were like doing a special favor kind of thing I mean, its like because some of their professors lived there and we would always say, you know one of your professors is in trouble, come. That kind of thing.

Uh so uh I, I, so I'll tell you the story about the Children's Center.

AMW: Okay.

WM: Who, uh, Ted Lewis was the executive director.

AMW: Ted Lewis, L-e-w-i-s?

WM: Right. He's got his MSW, you know, Master's of Social Work, and I think everybody in the place did, and they're a group that they try and teach children and families to have an independent life. That's their goal and I kind of like their style.

They had a good style. But they weren't very capitalistic minded. For instance, they, I learned that they leased properties, satellite properties all around, their headquarters was at, were at 101 West, East Alexandrine and their satellite properties were all over and they were all in premium buildings and they were all paying top dollar and they were signing long term leases and they, their funding was short term.

AMW: So they weren't business people?

WM: No.

AMW: They were medical people?

WM: They were social workers. So, I said to them, you know this is crazy. You guys are in the catbird seat here. You've got such a marketable thing that you should be able to raise money or have properties donated to you and you become a landlord and they looked at me like I had three heads. (both laugh)

AMW: They don't think that way.

WM: They did not. They came around though. They came around and uh they made me chair of their building grounds committee and uh we, we, we were expanding like crazy because the need is so great in Detroit to help these kids, it's just crazy. I mean its just crazy. And they've got great programs and a great, great, great organization. They are right on Alexandrine, 101 East is where they were. And they wanted to expand. That was our goal was to expand and make a campus and bring every, the satellites in. So I contacted all of the adjacent property owners and found out that Detroit Medical Center already was bidding against us. So we didn't have a chance.

AMW: Right.

WM: We did have one property that we were able to get and it's that little motel on the corner of Woodward and Alexandrine. And there's a cute story about that. They were running prostitutes out of there and drugs and the manager was the madam (Wambeke laughs) and so I looked up the owner and found out that it was this big shot attorney downtown. So I went down to his office and met with him and said—

AMW: Do you want to give us his name?

WM: No.

AMW: No? Okay.

WM: And said, cause I'm going to embarrass him, (Wambeke laughs) and I said you know are you aware that your motel. I said, I'm sure you're aware that your motel is

a whorehouse and I can buy drugs there. And he was totally insulted, I mean, you know, he almost spit up on his five hundred dollar tie, you know. I mean, he said that's my mother's property and you're defaming my mother's name and how can you say this? And, you know, I, that's just not true and we've had that manager there for thirty years and she's real good and blablabla. (Wambeke laughs) I said look, let's get in the car right now and what's your pleasure? I can get you any kind of drug or prostitute you want in your building and I took him up there. And he was blown away. And he donated the property to the Children's Center. (both laugh) True story.

AMW: Oh that's a great story. Wow.

WM: Isn't it? That's a great story. So we found we couldn't, we were having trouble getting property over there so the west side of Woodward at the time was just garbage, I mean it was terrible, terrible. It was terrible. And there were a lot of vacant buildings, a lot of vacant property and so I said let's move west of Woodward instead. So we were able to pick, pick up some properties. And I owned some property there and I donated it to the Children's Center. And uh we built a building and at 79 West Alexandrine, and then I think I told you the story, that it evolved into being the president there for three years and then just as I was stepping down, Ted Lewis came to me and said boy, you did a great job, Bill. We want you to stick around for, we're going to have another capital campaign. I don't know if you've ever done a capital campaign but it's terrible.

AMW: They're a nightmare, yeah.

WM: Terrible. Terrible. It's so humiliating. And I do know now why people give in the name of anonymous. (laughs)

AMW: Exactly. Leave me alone. (laughs)

WM: So uh, yeah, so he said we want you to stick around and chair the capital campaign to raise money for the new building with Lisa Ford and I said well I really I don't have any interest in that at all and he said well actually we'd like to name it after your deceased son, Paul.

AMW: So he knew what he was doing.

WM: So he learned. He wasn't just, (both laugh) he wasn't just a socialist.

AMW: You taught him well.

WM: No, no, he taught m. We were a good team. We were really a good team. We laughed because we were so—He was a lot of fun. He was good, really good. So anyway, so we raised the money, we built the building and we named it after my son, Paul, which was really an honor. It's a block away from where we used to live. I

used to walk by that spot, take him to the parade, the Thanksgiving Day Parade. We walked right by it and I had bought the building that was there. And then we demolished the building, and anyway, they built that.

AMW: Are you still involved with it?

WM: The Children's Center?

AMW: The Children's Center.

WM: No, I am, what do they call it? When you're out to pasture? Erman…

AMW: era… emera…

WM: Emeritus? No?

AMW: I know what you're talking about. (laughs)

WM: When you're put out to pasture but you're still on the Board.

AMW: But you're still there, yeah.

WM: Yeah I was on the board for thirty years.

AMW: Wow, that's a long time to be involved with an organization.

WM: And I really thought that they needed young blood so I voluntarily stepped down and I looked around the executive committee and I said there's a lot of us here that are gray haired and there's really time for young people to step up and take our slots but they can't take our slots as long as we're in these seats so I'm getting up and giving up my seat and if anyone else wants to follow me come on. Nobody followed.

AMW: Nobody followed? (both laugh) And did any young people step up to take yours?

WM: Yes they did.

AMW: Did they? Oh wonderful.

WM: They took some great, some great, actually—Tina Ford took my seat and she's been exceptional, exceptional.

AMW: Oh, good.

WM: She was just great, great. She's in charge of philanthropy. So uh—

AMW: So were you involved in other, any other activist organizations? You mentioned the Detroit Club. I don't know what that is. Is that something you were involved in?

WM: I, I was, I met that through Ken Davies again. Ken's been a pivotal part in my life, I guess, and he got me to be a member there. And, you know, I wasn't active in it. But, they were big shoots that belonged there. You know, the chairs of, the heads, the CEOs of all the different places and they decided that it wasn't financially feasible anymore and they were going to close it down and board it up, and here's a picture of it, and I just couldn't imagine seeing that boarded up.

AMW: It's beautiful.

WM: It's on the corner of Cass and Fort, downtown. And so myself and a number of other people, Ken, John Booth, Bill Rands and a number of other people got together and said we'll save it, you know, and so we did. We were able to save it for about sixteen years. And finally, we finally had to sell it. It was just, there were just no men's clubs, even though it had the first woman president, it had the first women member of any club in Detroit, first woman president of any club in Detroit, first black member of any club in Detroit and this was back in the sixties. Damon Keith was a member, he was one of the members, a lot of good people. He was involved in our saving it, as a matter of fact. So anyway, that was just an aside.

One of the other things Ken did was he got me involved in the Ferry Street, East Ferry, the bed and breakfasts. Okay. Ken was on the Board of Trustees for the DIA and the DIA had acquired that block, the south side of the street, all those Victorian houses and uh Gilbert Silverman wanted to tear them down, you know Silverman, Gil Silverman, the big real estate guy. He was on the Board and uh he wanted to tear them down and build a museum of modern art and have a wing on the north side of the DIA, and Davies made this impassioned plea to the, to, to the trustees saying we are here as custodians for these works of art and these buildings are works of art and I agree with him and we should save them. And we're being contrary to our mission if we tear them down. And this was happening in the city of Detroit. They were tearing down all these works of art and it was up to us to save them. And they said, well, you know, that's totally impractical. You know, nobody wants to run them, you know, they're very difficult to manage and there's nobody around to do it. And he said well I know somebody who will do it. So I ended up managing them for about eight years and it was a nightmare, a total nightmare (Wambeke laughs). But because we were trying to run, you know, I won't get into the details, but anyway, we saved them and then Sue Mosey, with the, the University Cultural Center, was able to buy them or whatever they did. I don't know what, how they got them, but they spent millions of dollars on each one and they're absolutely spectacular, spectacular.

AMW: Oh they're beautiful.

WM: Inside. Have you been inside?

AMW: Umhm.

WM: Anyhow, anybody that comes to Detroit, I tell them that is where to stay.

AMW: Wayne State puts up a lot of people there.

WM: Oh yes. that's right. And they have good occupancy. And I think they're doing all right. So uh, so anyway we're in the late eighties, right? And, uh, things are getting bad. I mean it's kind of like the wild west, it's worse.

AMW: Come back?

WM: Yeah. We'd have peaks and valleys. And a lot of it, I hate to say it but a lot of it went along with the administration of the city.

AMW: The government?

WM: Yeah. You know, the reputation. Really, like Coleman, the first two years, the first two terms were strong, but then in the eighties it just petered out. And you had recession. And, you know, we had prune face in office. (both laugh) So anyway—

AMW: Who is prune face?

WM: Reagan. Yeah. He didn't like Reagan, so, and he called him prune face on national TV.

AMW: Did he?

WM: So anyway, you know, this is right after he told everybody to hit Eight Mile.

AMW: Yeah. Yeah.

WM: So, you know, there were certain things he did that I didn't approve of. But anyway, there were certain things he did that I thought was fine. But anyway, so in the late eighties we didn't have police protection, uh we didn't have fire protection. We didn't have squat. It was, we were dying. We were dying. It was bad. And uh—

AMW: So the drugs and the prostitution were still prevalent?

WM: Yeah. Yeah. And—

AMW: And of course there's a void and so that stuff all comes back in as soon as there's a void, right?

WM: Exactly and it was all in the south end of the corridor. So the north end of the corridor was all owner occupants preserving these Victorians and these other buildings. The south end is drugs and prostitution and derelicts and homelessness and street crime and just terrible—Terrible, terrible—

AMW: And hard to isolate?

WM: Hard to isolate. So uh Davies and I, Davies has this beautiful home on West Canfield. We're sitting in his backyard one day and we hear gunshots in, just on the other side of the fence, and it turns out it was, it was a Wayne State officer that was shot inside the triple six West Willis and we said this is it. You know, we got to do something. We can't just sit by and watch this happen. This is our livelihood, this is our community, these are our friends, these are people that, for a lot of reasons so uh we contacted the commander of the precinct and then the head of Wayne State's police and we asked them to come to a meeting of the community. And so we called the first meeting of the community group and we had, it was relatively short notice and I think we had three hundred people show up.

AMW: Wow.

WM: And, uh, cause people were mad as hell. I mean people were scared. And we said they've just got to help us. We can't do this ourselves. We, we need you. And so it evolved for a while and then uh, you know, we'd go in fits and starts and we came up with different programs and, but the one key part that I have to share is that, and, so Ken, Ken and I started this and he was kind of behind the scenes. Ken was a downtown silk stocking attorney who was also a liberal activist, but he was connected with a lot of, with a lot of politicians and they'd take his phone call. And so he, he would play behind the scenes and I was the chair. I would sit at the chair and we'd have the police there every month and we'd give them a list of the problem areas and ask them to focus on them. So they were putting out these brush fires. Right?

AMW: And this was both the Wayne State and the Detroit—

WM: Right.

AMW: City police?

WM: And I remember one of the, but we kept going through all these different commanders because there was just this turnover. It was just terrible—in Detroit. So they never had much continuity. But I remember one of the commanders said to us "this is not a fifty-yard dash. This is a marathon. You guys really have to stick to this if you expect to see results. And some day your biggest problems—Right now your biggest problem is officer down. Someday your biggest problem if you follow this through will be drag racing on Second Avenue." We all laughed. So uh things got

worse instead of better. So finally we said there's something wrong here. There's something really intrinsically wrong. We don't know what it is but it's not working. So we contacted the, the Chief of Police. Well actually we got to Saul Green who was the U.S. Attorney.

AMW: Umhm.

WM: And uh invited him because we always had these guests come. But what we did was we put together a, at the highest level of every agency, every law enforcement agency, we invited the, the head. And so we had Saul Green, we had John O'Hare, who was the prosecuting attorney, and we had the head of the Michigan State Police, we had the head of the FBI, we had the head of the DEA, we had the head of narcotics for Detroit, we had the Chief of Detroit Police, we had the chief of Wayne State. You know, the list just went on and on. And you might wonder how did you ever get all these people to show up in the same place? Because what I'd do when I talked to them, when I called them, Ken got Saul Green and then, so then so we, I'd call them, the next one, and say Saul Green has asked me to call you and invite you to join us. And he's coming. "Well if Saul 's coming, I'm coming." "Well, by the way, we're buying you dinner at Mario's." (laughs) So, those two things, the peer pressure and the free meal, because everyone loves Mario's but not everyone can afford to go to Mario's. So we had about a dozen, I want to say, cops up on this dais, the head table, with me. So in the meantime prior to the meeting I went out and I made a list, and again this was our focus on crime and cleanliness, those were the two issues and during our meetings if anybody ever brought anything else up I'd just put them out of order. You're out of order if it doesn't apply to crime and cleanliness. Next. So and we were always giving them the little problem areas that we had. But then I realized that we had these longstanding open notorious illegal activities going on and because I was in the real estate business, I knew who the owners of the properties were and I could see what was happening was these real estate, the drug dealers were buying the real estate.

AMW: Um.

WM: Because they were making so much money. And they can't, and then the landlord can't boot them out. So I put together a list of all the open illegal activities in the neighborhood. Actually, and when I say the neighborhood, what, our area was from the I-75 on the south, 94 on the north, 75 on the east and the Lodge on the west. So inside the freeways, we always felt that was the moat. If we could secure those borders, we'd be fine.

AMW: Right. The freeways helped then at that point.

WM: And so I made a list of the, of the places and there were thirty-two of them.

AMW: Wow.

WM: Wide open. I mean anything you want. And we gave and put down their names of the owners, the names of the dealers, what they were dealing, what their record was, what, you know, as much information as we could get. Put together in a presentation and uh after dinner I just said, you know, we just have a very simple request for all of you. And, by the way, this was the first time that the head of narcotics for the city of Detroit ever met the head of narcotics for the DEA—At that table.

AMW: Why? (laughs) Why didn't that happen sooner?

WM: Isn't that amazing? Because Coleman Young wouldn't let them talk to each other. That's why. But anyway, I passed it around. Gave it to everybody and said "here's our problem, you're the solution. Get back to us when you've solved it. But we can't put up with this any longer." And then, O'Hare got the law passed that allowed them to forfeit properties that were illegal, you know they were doing illegal activities on, and then Duggan came in after him and really pushed it. Really did a hell of a job, a fine job and was able within five years, all thirty-two properties were, the owners were either in jail or dead. So it was very effective.

AMW: Right.

WM: And I think that really, and at the same time, we had this great coverage from Wayne State all along, Wayne State police, but now we had the cooperation between Wayne and DPD and the feds and the feds are powerful, they're really powerful. Saul Green says make it happen and it happens.

AMW: Right. Definitely.

WM: So and great guys, great people. So I would say that was probably the biggest turning point because of Wayne State police and all these other agencies.

AMW: And what, what year was that? Early nineties?

WM: Yeah, it would have been, we brought them together in '95 and uh, yeah, and by 2000 everything was pretty much calmed down. And so then at about the same time, the University Cultural Center Association changed their name to Midtown Inc. and they were able to raise funds through philanthropic sources, multimillions of dollars and put together a lot of stimulation, you know they had a façade grant improvement-matching grant. They had rent subsidies for employees of Wayne State, Henry Ford and the DMC in any of he buildings in that location. You know, those things really, really helped. And then they also acquired some properties and they've been real good for us. And then—

AMW: And then did businesses start to come in as well?

WM: Oh big time. Oh big time. Yeah.

AMW: When did that start? When did the smaller businesses start to spring up?

WM: Really in the, after 2010, I really want to say, you know.

AMW: So did they, how does that work? Did they follow the residents? Is that typically—

WM: The businesses?

AMW: Yeah. Is that typically how that would work?

WM: Yeah and I think they also follow each other. I really do. I mean, you know, Shinola comes and then Hopcat comes. And now Carhartt's here. And, you know, all these, one chef comes and then there's all these other chefs are coming. Jack White from White Stripes or whatever, he's come. I mean, it's just, Will's Leather. Those all just happened in the last few years.

AMW: So what's the, what do you think was the business that kind of started that up? Was there one that you can point to and say, this business came and it just kind of snowballed from there?

WM: I don't want to say that because there's been so many businesses that have hung in there through the years through thick and thin. I mean there's businesses that were here before me in the fifties. Fred's Key Shop's been here since the early fifties, late fifties, early sixties. Mario's been here since '49. You know Traffic Jam's been here since '65. You know so—

AMW: So they stuck it through bad times?

WM: Yeah and, I mean, they were the fabric that held the business community together.

AMW: At that. In tough times.

WM: Very tough times. Very, very tough times. And uh and proved that there's a market, that you can make a living off it. So there's some newer ones, and I named some of them, but of course everybody talks about now. But when they converted the Whitney to a restaurant, that was major. That guy really put his life on the line to do that, spent millions of dollars to do that. These people have been there for a long time. You know, the Majestic Theatre. Majestic Theater's been there since the twenties.

AMW: Right.

WM: So it, yeah—

AMW: So it's a very slow process.

WM: Yeah. I think we've, we've hit a turning point, or a tipping point. There's, there's clearly a tipping point here recently. You know, where there's very, very, very, very strong demand to live here. I mean, it's just crazy, crazy demand. Very low occupan— [Marsh recognized he chose wrong word], very low vacancies, real synergy among the restaurateurs. It's the hot spot now.

AMW: Right.

WM: For people all over the world to come here—

AMW: Right. It's written up all over.

WM: To open a restaurant. It's walkable. It's safe. It's clean.

AMW: Go back to your safe and clean.

WM: In fact, another funny story—Not funny, but interesting story—One of our cleanups—We used to have a spring and a fall cleanup and the areas were terrible, I mean they were just terrible—Just debris, trees, abandoned tires, houses falling down—So at the very beginning of the cleanup, one of the first cleanups, we had our meeting and were talking about the cleanup and Tony Scappaticci who owns Allied Building, who again, has been in the neighborhood since the fifties—

AMW: Could you spell that?

WM: No. (both laugh) S-c-a-p-i-t-t-i, something like that. Scappaticci. Great guy. He said, he had, he had this Allied Building Company and he said, we said, what are we going to do with all the trash. We were trying to get DPT to coordinate the trash, which, of course, was like pulling teeth. Because the last meeting, the time before that they didn't pick it up for weeks and months and then it got strewn all over the streets and it looked worse than when it got started. So Tony said, look, I'll provide you with roll out, forty yard roll out dumpsters. You guys fill them, I'll keep them coming, as many as you can fill. I'll provide. Well these aren't cheap. They are five hundred, six hundred bucks apiece.

AMW: Right, right.

WM: So he rolled them in. We filled fifty of them.

AMW: Oh wow.

WM: Fifty of them. We put a whole house into one of them. You know, we just, we had them on, we coordinated every block and then just filled them and it, it made a

difference. It made a big difference–again safe and clean—and you drive through now, oh and the other thing was, we had a police officer, Gibson, Officer Gibson, he was the environmental officer, they, we got him assigned just to our precinct and so he'd come to our meeting. We'd tell him where environmental problems were, trash or whatever. He'd go out and write a ticket.

AMW: Hum.

WM: And there's like a three hundred dollar fine. So all of a sudden people got religion.

AMW: They were incentivized to clean it up.

WM: Yeah. So it was very incremental, very, very slow, very incremental. It's kind of like plodding along, just keep coming in every day and doing your homework and it finally gets done. But, uh, keep it simple, stupid. It really is. It's not brain surgery. It's like real estate management. It's not brain surgery. It was simple. You're just firm and fair. Treat everybody fair, but be firm. But a lot of people can't do that.

AMW: Right.

WM: A lot of people can't do the same thing every day and be steady eddy.

AMW: Right.

WM: Somehow or another I got to be steady eddy. I don't know how. So, I know we got to wrap up here.

AMW: We can keep going if you, do you have time?

WM: I have time. I thought you said an hour though.

AMW: Well that's what we were set up for, but I'm happy to keep going.

WM: Oh okay. I'll skip my conclusion for a minute. (laughs)

AMW: Um, because I have more questions, actually.

WM: Oh good.

AMW: I'm curious about the, the people you worked with. You've mentioned a few. You've mentioned Ken and Beulah. Were there other people that you partnered with over the years that you think were critical to the, to the changes that we've seen in the Cass Corridor?

WM: Well. One of them happens to be your professor, Kim, Kim Schroeder. She bought a house on Canfield and was very active in the Midtown Alliance and, in fact, when I stepped down from the Midtown Alliance, she stepped up and she's now the chair in my stead.

AMW: So she's one of the younger people again—the next generation.

WM: Yeah—he next generation. Right. Uh I mentioned Ted Lewis. He was instrumental. Commander Holt at Wayne State—absolutely the glue that held this whole thing together. Absolutely. He's still doing it. Everyday he's in there plodding away. Uh, he's expanded his boundaries. He, uh, I don't know if you're aware of it but they've got cameras on most the street corners.

AMW: Oh okay. I didn't know that.

WM: Most people don't. They've got three full time employees sitting in front of screens right down the street here on Cass watching those cameras. And when you drive around the neighborhood now look up at the street lights on the poles, on the street poles—

AMW: You'll see them?

WM: You'll see them. And they watch these cameras twenty-four-seven. And they see anything that looks out of the ordinary, they send a squad car there.

AMW: Oh wow.

WM: So that's real proactive policing. You know, they'll be out there and they'll see someone looks nefarious, suspicious, and they'll just pull them over and say what are you doing here, let's see some ID. What's, what's your business here?

AMW: Uhhuh.

WM: And the bad people don't want to put up with that. They go where the easy pickings are.

AMW: Right. Right.

WM: You know. They go where it's easy.

AMW: And they know that that's out there.

WM: Yep. And so he's done that through this whole area—through this whole area. And in fact Gilbert, who came in and bought a lot of stuff downtown, one of the first things he did was have his director of security meet with Chief Holt and ask him how he did it.

AMW: Oh wow.

WM: So then they did the same thing. They got cameras all downtown. So we got cameras. And you know this is what they do in London. In London they've been doing cameras for decades and they don't carry guns. The police don't carry guns in London because they don't need them.

AMW: You mentioned a little bit about the, the role of the different governments in the whole changing of the Cass Corridor, federal, state and local. Was your experience, I mean you kind of alluded to the fact that they oftentimes didn't work together and when they finally came together, it actually made a difference.

WM: Well yeah. Yeah.

AMW: And you also alluded to the fact that sometimes with these, the local administrations, things changed in the city depending on the administration.

WM: Absolutely.

AMW: How about the state government. Were they involved at all?

WM: I don't think so. Yeah. I guess one of the, you could say they were involved indirectly through the historic tax credits. You know you can get tax credits for renovating historic property if you spend more than your basis, so uh, yeah, there was that, I guess, because there was a lot of that going on. That was a lot of the motivation back in the day. Although you wouldn't qualify if you were an owner occupant.

AMW: Hm.

WM: Had to be an investment property.

AMW: Oh. I'm, I'm just kind of curious in the roles of various, various things in this—like big business. What do you think is the role of big business in, in changing a neighborhood, or the role of nonprofits in, in affecting what's going on in neighborhoods. Do they play a role?

WM: Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah. In fact, I mentioned the incentives, the midtown incentives for midtown living. That was really Henry Ford and DMC and Wayne State getting together and saying what can we do to encourage our people to live here and they each kicked in, I want to say it was two hundred thousand apiece, and I talked to the, to the medical director up at Henry Ford and he said it was absolutely the best investment they ever made. Their return on investment was phenomenal because it was leveraged with the other partners and it, it, just the press alone was worth the cost of admission.

AMW: I saw it here at Wayne.

WM: Yeah. So as far as that, yes, and then the other thing on nonprofits, as long as, yes, as long as they work with the community and not agin'em. You know, like the NSO, for instance. I don't know if you're familiar with them. I should have drove you by it, it's on the corner of Third and Martin Luther King. And it's a, their stated purpose is a respite off the mean streets for heroin addicts, but they don't provide any programs and they don't let them stay there. They just let them come in and get warm for a few hours and then they push them back on the streets.

AMW: They kick them back out?

WM: And you drive by there. Drive by Third and Martin Luther King.

AMW: I think I've seen it.

WM: It's unbelievable. It looks like the slums of India. I mean people just standing around with nothing to do and nowhere to go and they're mentally ill, a lot of them, and they just cause problems. So, but you know my experience with, like for instance, the Children's Center, Ted Lewis always preached that in order to be a good non-profit you've got to make a profit. Otherwise you're out of business.

AMW: Capitalism?

WM: (both laugh) You just can't run a deficit all the time. The federal government's the only one allowed to do that. So uh yeah I think that a good, well run non-profit is—

AMW: Are there any? Can you name some of them?

WM: Uh, the Children's Center. Uh, second would be the Children's Center. (Wambeke laughs) Third would be the Children's Center. No, I'm teasing. But well, for instance, the DMC, okay. When Duggan came in and ran the DMC like a profit center, I mean, it was great, great. I'm not sure, I suppose Wayne State has a certain degree of that. Wayne State's been a very good neighbor. They're development, they're very positive. Uh, Tech Town another great neighbor. You know, very positive. Henry Ford Health Systems. I mean they're just doing a billion dollar, billion dollar development to the south of them. I mean that's pretty significant and get your attention. Uh St. Paul's Cathedral. Great neighbor, great, really good people. I mean you just can go on and on and on. They are the survivors. Look at Orchestra Hall. Same thing. The Max. So I'd say we have a really, really great mix of non-profits, capitalists, socialists, education, tech and medical. I mean, think about it. If you, if you brought somebody in from anywhere in the world and just didn't tell them where you were but told them here's what, here's what's going on in this location, they'd think this was the golden corridor, not the Cass Corridor.

AMW: Right.

WM: And again—you asked me, I know its over simplistic but no question in my mind after living here for fifty years almost, racism was clearly the biggest detriment. It was the biggest thing that slowed us down. Uh in fact I can, did, I think I sent you a copy of that, there was even a cartoon in the paper. Did you get that?

AMW: I think so yeah.

WM: This is Kenny Cockrel calling us honky racists because it turns out that a lot of the people that were interested in historic preservation happened to be Caucasian because that's where their roots were.

AMW: Right.

WM: And I, I tried to bring black people on Canfield so many times and I was only successful once. There is only one black owner on the street, can you imagine? And I asked him why. And he said, Bill, we've been trying to get out of here. We want to get out of the ghetto. We don't want to come back here.

AMW: Well that's fascinating. So Kenny Cockrel was the, on the City Council right?

WM: Yeah. He was the chair of the City Council. He was a liberal guy but uh—

AMW: So explain what he, what the situation was. How did this all play out?

WM: Well, there was a housing development going in at the corner of Third and Canfield. And we had been fighting to get the prostitutes off the streets for years and with no avail. This was back in the early 70s, and so when they wanted to build this low income housing project, Ken Davies sued them in federal court on the basis that it wasn't including the, it wasn't, they hadn't included the opinions of the historic district and because it was a national historic district they needed to have some sort of open discussion with them and we weren't going to allow, they said they were going to allow it. I had a quote here. But anyway, they were going to hold up this development, which was low income, probably black, until they got the whores off the corners and Kenny felt that was a racist, honky thing to do. But it worked. Yeah, they got the whores off the corners and shut down Anderson's Gardens and shut down the Willis Show Bar, oh, and shut down the topless shoeshine parlor.

AMW: Topless shoeshine. (laughs)

WM: Can you get a visual on that?

AMW: Oh boy. (laughs)

WM: It was interesting. There was, there was one place where racism didn't apply because they had girls that were both black and white. You get, you get to pick whichever one you want.

AMW: (laughs) Oh that's unreal.

WM: Yeah.

AMW: Uh. So, so there were, there were certain members of the black community that resented the white developers coming in and trying to save the area?

WM: No. I wouldn't say that. I wouldn't—

AMW: How would you describe Kenny Cockrel's, what was his, what was it that he was angry about then? How would you describe—

WM: Now we're talking about Kenny Cockrel Senior.

AMW: Okay. Right. I know his son was on the city council recently.

WM: His son was on the council as well. Well just to bring it all full circle, Ken Cockrel Senior was a law student and a tenant of Ken Davies.

AMW: Oh okay.

WM: In his home. And when Ken ran for common, for council, Ken had his first fundraiser in his backyard.

AMW: Oh wow.

WM: And when Ken's, and when Kenny died, uh Davies showed up on Kenny Junior's doorstep and said, I'm your new dad. And I'm going to help raise you and you come to me for anything you need. Blablabla. And uh so when Kenny Cockrel Junior ran for Council, Ken had his first fundraiser in his backyard as well.

AMW: Oh yeah.

WM: Yeah. So my point is I don't, I think it was just a matter of political necessity at the time. Yeah he could pick his, pick his, pick his, statements. You know, that's how politicians are. They play to the crowd.

AMW: Well, they always do, don't they. Um, let's see. You talked about generational leaders and I've seen this in some of the things I've read about you too that you seem to feel like it's time for a new generation in the area, um, and you mentioned a few. You mentioned Kim Schroeder. Can you think of some other generational

leaders that are stepping forward, the next generation that's kind of stepping forward now to—

WM: Well, my kids. Both of them.

AMW: Yeah. Let's talk about your kids a little bit. This is, for you it's a family thing. Your wife has been involved with you always, and now your kids are kind of stepping up and, and becoming involved. Talk a little bit about them.

WM: Yeah. Well Peter, Peter graduated from Marquette University and he has bought and managed real estate in his own right and—

AMW: This is your son.

WM: My son. Yeah, he's now forty-one. And, uh doing a fine job of it. They did, they both moved out to California for a while and I thought I'd lost them, to be honest with you, and then they both decided it was better back here than in California. The golden state has lost its luster. It really has. I mean it was the cost of living and the commute and the drought and this, the whole thing.

AMW: Right.

WM: Terrible.

AMW: So when did they come back?

WM: Uh let's see. Two thousand something. You'd think I'd know off the top of my head, wouldn't you? My grandson was born in 2010, 2011 excuse me. They came back in 2012. So he was about six months old and then our granddaughter was born here. So 2011. So they came back right at the, I'd say at the, you know, we had the big financial crisis in '09.

AMW: Right. Funny how our lives kind of go around the financial crises, right. They're defining moments.

WM: Right. And then they were, so they were able to come back here and they were able to buy some properties.

AMW: Both of your children?

WM: Both of them. Yeah. At some, um, you know, in the rising tide, if you will. And yeah, so they're doing a fine job. Ken Davies' kids are running his stuff now. He does, he has real estate here too. Pat Dorn's kids are running, live here. Pat was the fellow that did the—

AMW: Oh, that's really interesting. So everyone's kids have kind of come back and are involved?

WM: Yeah. Uh I'm thinking Marilyn Klipper, she was one of the original people here, and her son Matt is now organizing the Dally in the Alley, which you may have heard of.

AMW: Yeah. Will you explain that?

WM: The Dally in the Alley? Yeah. (laughs) Well it's evolved way beyond its capacity in my opinion (Wambeke laughs) because when it started, I was there at first one, which was like twenty-five years ago by now. It was one alley with a bunch of hippies selling tie dyed tee shirts. (both laugh) That was basically what it was and other things, paraphernalia of all sorts. Uh, now it's like, it's on steroids. It's ten thousand, twenty thousand people.

AMW: Oh wow.

WM: I don't know, whatever it is. It's just crazy and it covers three, four blocks and the streets are all closed and it's a nightmare. I mean, for me it's a nightmare, but I guess the bars and restaurants like it.

AMW: Yeah.

WM: So its kinda, it's a, it's a celebration of the neighborhood but its kind of like, it's the same story I told you the story about how, when we'd have the snow-in parties. Uh—

AMW: Would you tell that?

WM: Yeah the first year we did it, this was like in the early, late seventies. The first big snowfall when they shut down the schools and shut down the streets we'd host a party at our home at Alexandrine and Second and uh, the rules were that you had to walk, you couldn't drive, which eliminated a lot of outsiders and uh two, that you had to bring something to eat. So the first year we had about, I don't know, fifty people probably, and in the second year there were hundreds and the third year we had to stop doing it because it was just out of control. There were just wall-to-wall people. We just couldn't fit anymore. And the house was six thousand square feet and we couldn't fit any more in.

AMW: Couldn't fit any more in even at that size?

WM: (both laugh) So yeah I mean and it's the, that's the sense of community. There's a real sense of community here that's really, really strong, really strong. I mean we still see the people that we saw back in the seventies that we met here. You know a lot of them went to Wayne. A lot of them. Yeah. So there's definitely a

passing of the torch. Definitely. It's all good too. And you know, then, all these young chefs coming in, fantastic, fantastic. And all these, all these retailers coming in, just great.

AMW: Now you mentioned in something that I read that you thought the Midtown Alliance was the, kind of the link between Cass Corridor and Midtown?

WM: Right.

AMW: Could you talk about that a little bit and then also kind of talk about—Well I'll ask you that question after you talk about this one so we don't lose track.

WM: Well what I meant by that was that there was uh, by bringing together all this, the different constituencies, you know, we had social workers, we had capitalists, we had hookers, we had ministers, you know, we had lawyers, we had doctors, we had welfare mothers, you know, we had everybody. I mean everybody; it was very eclectic. Well educated, not educated. But the two common denominators were crime and cleanliness. That's what we all agreed on and we all focused on it. And because of that we were able to get the area physically cleaned up and then morally cleaned up, by bringing together these cops. And, and not just cops, prosecutors and the forfeiture laws and all that. And we had a lot of great, great cops, great cops. I remember John Whitty, we called them Whitty's raiders. You know and they were special ops. They called them special ops. I got into all this—I never knew any of this stuff. I mean I was never involved in this at all. I was always on the wrong side. You know. (both laugh)

AMW: You were the rebel.

WM: But, you know, they, just super, just super people who came in and helped us out a lot. And a lot of the cops put their lives on the line. These police officers were just phenomenal, were just phenomenal. I mean what they go through on a day-to-day basis is just nuts, nuts. But, if there is anything, that, I think it just starts out small and it's that whole thing about, you know, the, if everybody cleans up their front porch the whole world will be clean in a heartbeat. You know, that kind of thing. Or, you know, the broken window theory too. If you start fixing something up, then your neighbor will start fixing it up. That kind of thing works. It really works, especially if you're communicating with them. And we'd have all kinds of social functions too. We'd have street fairs and parties. It wasn't all just work. It was a lot of fun too.

AMW: Building a community.

WM: Yeah. Yeah. And we'd adopt people. We'd adopt families for Christmas, that kind of thing. Take kids to the Thanksgiving Day Parade. Children's Center does a lot of that, by the way. They helped over ten thousand families last year. Twenty five million dollar budget. They're very good. They've a great autism program now they

just started up. It's one of the best in the world. Kind of cool. I can't speak, very dedicated. Very, very good people. I'm so familiar with them. I've worked with them for so long. They just never cease to amaze me. So what was your next question?

AMW: So what do you think about the future of this area? Are you really optimistic with all the changes that are going on, what do you think of those? Good, bad, both?

WM: Buy real estate. (Wambeke laughs) It ain't going down. Ain't, and they aren't making any more of it. We've reached the tipping point. No question in my mind. I mean you've seen the new construction. Seen a lot of new construction.

AMW: A lot of it. Just this morning driving around.

WM: You've seen a lot of renovation. I mean I bet there's hundreds of millions of dollars of renovation going on right now and a lot more in the works. Uh you'd asked me earlier about the M-1 line. I think the M-1 line is going to be a total game changer. You know, you can research it. Anything, that statistically anything within four blocks, which is walking distance to an M-1 stop, quadruples in value within the first five years after it goes up. No need for parking. And what I see the M-1 line doing is moving the people that already live here to where they work and play. So you'll be able to live in Midtown, take it down to the stadiums or to the medical center or work downtown. I think its really going to, it's absolutely outstanding. It's just, I really commend the people that did it. They really had foresight to be able to pull it off, particularly. And this may be very controversial, but I don't see any reason for it to go any further. I think its real nice just where is goes, from the Boulevard to the river. Let those areas develop of their own accord and then extend it. But to extend it out to Royal Oak, I don't see it. Or wherever they're talking about. A. It'll be too expensive. It's not going to happen; and B. whose going to ride it? So that's my opinion. But I think what they did is perfect, perfect. And I always thought the people mover was insane. I have to tell you, from the day they came up with the idea, I thought, it goes where? It goes nowhere. But anyway. And who uses it? But people will use the M-1 line, no question in my mind. I'm really excited about it. And you can already see, I mean there's already speculation going on. You know Woodward Avenue. Woodward Avenue. You can't buy anything on Woodward Avenue anymore. Well, in fact, uh the Midtown Inc. folks did just buy the corner of the Boulevard and Woodward and they're going to put multi, multi million dollars into that corner, the southeast corner.

AMW: What have you done, what, what are you most proud of?

WM: My kids.

AMW: Your kids?

WM: And my wife. Yeah she uh, and I should tell you, even though I told you we, we started this out, are we almost there, because I started this, we started this out with

my November 13, 1970 and my ten year plan so last week it was November 13, 1915, or 2015, excuse me, and we celebrated our 45th wedding anniversary.

AMW: Wow. Congratulations.

WM: So, that's, I'm proud of that. That's the most important. Yeah.

AMW: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

WM: Well just that it, it clearly isn't one person. One person can make a difference but that's not the answer. One person is not the answer. It's a whole community of people. It's a lot of people and a lot of people doing a lot of work and I'm just kind of flashing, in talking about this and kind of getting ready for it, I kind of flash on all the people, the names, the people who've come through the door and had all these dreams, hopes and aspirations and some of them didn't make it. They couldn't handle the work, they couldn't handle the work load or they were intimidated or whatever, I don't know, whatever, for whatever reason they went to what they thought was going to be rosier climates, but I think it's a great time to be in Detroit. I've seen a lot in forty-five years. (laughs)

AMW: You have. You've made tremendous contributions.

WM: So it's been a lot of fun, it's been a lot of fun, a lot of fun. A lot of my friends and people that I hang out with have connections here one way or another and I think that there's a lot of that. You know my nephew lives here, my kids have property here, you know, that kind of thing.

AMW: I think it's exciting to hear about all the children of your contemporaries all coming back and doing the same thing.

WM: Isn't that interesting?

AMW: Yeah. That's very interesting.

WM: I never thought it would take, well I guess I did, in one of those articles I read I said that it wouldn't happen till the next generation, but it really took two generations. It took, it took forty-five years, but I'd say its, we've turned the corner. No question in my mind we've turned the corner. Well and, for instance, I told you about the hit list that we made, the thirty-two properties with, and I mean we're talking major stuff, I mean major criminal activity and one of the things we did was to hire a private police force because we weren't getting a proper police force. So we started that back in the eighties, I guess, Magnum Security, and then we stopped it when things got better and then when things got worse we started it again and um we continued it, although on a limited basis, but I got the report here, I get the reports every month and there's nothing going on.

AMW: Yeah, that's what you sent me, right. The report, eh? They're just checking on parked cars. Nothing ever happens. Which is a good thing.

WM: Whereas just a few short years ago, you know, they had break ins or panhandlers or breaking into cars, that kind of thing. That doesn't exist. That doesn't happen now. I mean, that's proof in the pudding right there.

AMW: That's huge, yeah.

WM: That's proof. That's not just talk. Those are real statistics. And those guys are getting paid and he knows if he doesn't find something, he's not going to be getting paid, you know.

AMW: Right.

WM: I mean, I know how capitalism works. (laughs)

AMW: Exactly.

WM: Yeah. I think its very, very safe because of a lot of people. I mean there's always going to be problems. You don't get anything, in a major metropolitan area. And the other thing, I thing is that I think it's really interesting, when you look at the national context of the black and white thing there's just so many places that have so many problems and Detroit does not. I mean, my God we elected a white mayor. You know, we got a black police chief that moved back to Detroit because he wanted to help out. Those are beautiful things. The fire chief is a retired cop and his son's a fireman. Those are huge things. Those are huge. I mean that's real continuity, that's beautiful, I think.

And the other thing we have, if again, I didn't mention this, I should have probably, is the charter schools. You know we've got some phenomenal charter schools in, in Midtown. You know Thompson's got a grade school, middle school, high school, uh they've got the Center for Creative Studies has a high school. There's a high school for fine, performing arts. You know there's a high school for the, the uh, not, let's see, the Science Center, Science and Technology High School and those are, those are super. University Prep. And you know in Thompson Schools there's, he has a ninety-ninety formula.

AMW: No.

WM: Yeah. He put up the money. He put up private money for this but he did it on the condition that ninety percent of the students have to graduate within four years and ninety percent of those have to go to college. Or he pulls the funding and he's been funding them for over ten years. And if you drive by, when you see those kids get dropped off man, they are scrubbed and clean and wearing a tie, and their

parents are picking them up and dropping them off and there's real peer pressure and its really, really cool.

AMW: That's so key. Education is so key.

WM: Yes, yes it is. And we've got it going here. We really do. So thanks. Very happy with the way things are.

AMW: Wonderful. Did you want to make some concluding remarks?

WM: Um. Well thank you for the opportunity.

AMW: Well thank you for talking to me.

WM: You've made me be very introspective and I also should say that I've never ever told anybody all this.

AMW: Well now you've told anybody, any, any scholar who wants to read it.

WM: Yeah, because I've always been very private. I learned early on it doesn't pay to shoot your mouth off. I just don't believe that. You know, so—and you said that you were looking me up. You didn't find much.

AMW: I didn't find much, no.

WM: I know because that's by design. Anyway—

AMW: But your information will be invaluable to scholars. So I thank you very much for taking the time to talk to me.

WM: Oh. You're welcome. You're welcome. Well thank you.

AMW: Thank you.

WM: It was fun.