Cass Corridor Oral History Project

Detroit, MI

Bruce Harkness

Interviewed by

Sandra Svoboda

November 13, 2016

Detroit, Michigan

As part of the Oral History Class in the School of Library and Information Science

Kim Schroeder, Instructor

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Brief Biography: A native Detroiter and resident of the Cass Corridor during the 1970s and 1980s, Bruce L. Harkness photographed Detroit's people, neighborhoods and institutions. He earned a bachelor's degree from the Center for Creative Studies in photography and a master's in fine arts from Wayne State University. From 1990-2010 he worked as the city of Dearborn's photographer. Harkness roamed the Cass Corridor during the 1970s and 1980s, photographing residents of a now-demolished apartment building called the Niagara, performers at the Gold Dollar, and street scenes. He worked with Wayne State University History Professor John Bukowczyk on the "Urban Interiors Project" (1987-1990), creating about 3,500 black-and-white photographs and oral history interviews documenting the lives of some four dozen Detroit families in the Chene Corridor on the city's east side. For eight months in 1981 he visited the Poletown neighborhood as it was being razed for the General Motors Detroit/Hamtramck Assembly Plant. Harkness was retired at the time of this interview, spending time digitizing his thousands of photographs.

Interviewer: Sandra Svoboda, MPA, conducted this interview as an assignment for her Wayne State University Oral History class, an elective in her master of library and information science program. At the time of the interview, she worked at WDET, Wayne State's public radio station and a National Public Radio affiliate. She moved to the Detroit in 1990 and began classes at WSU in 1992 toward her master's in public administration. She also has a bachelor's degree in journalism and history from Indiana University. She has taught as an adjunct instructor at WSU in political science, journalism, speech communication, and public relations.

Abstract: Now retired, photographer Bruce Harkness discusses his time as a Center for Creative Studies undergraduate and Wayne State University graduate student when he photographed now-gone people, buildings and establishments in the Cass Corridor. He also documented the razing of the Poletown neighborhood in 1981 as land was cleared and people displaced for the General Motors Detroit/Hamtramck Assembly plant and contributed to an oral history project, Urban Interiors, in another Detroit neighborhood. As the city of Dearborn photographer for twenty years, he photographed city officials and residents in that community. He discusses his photography work (including time as a darkroom technician at the downtown Detroit Hudson's headquarters), what it reveals about Detroit history, how his work changed with the advent of digital, his reflections on changes in the city, reconnecting with some of the subjects of his decades-old projects, and people he met in Detroit's neighborhoods.

Restrictions: None

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Cass Corridor Oral History Project

Walter P. Reuther Library

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Detroit MI

Transcript of interview conducted November 13, 2016 with:

Bruce Harkness, Detroit, Michigan

By Sandra Svoboda

START OF Harkness Audio 1

Svoboda: I'm going to go ahead and start recording as we are looking at photos. Tell me what we are looking at.

Harkness: That's a woman, Mary Caffery. I grew up in Brighton and I came to Detroit. I enrolled at Center for Creative Studies. Then it was called the Arts School of the Society of Arts and Crafts in (19)75. I enrolled in the photography program and I was not particularly interested in commercial photography I guess because of photographers I was introduced to at school or I was familiar with, I was interested in people photography, urban environment. So after a little while, I realized it's too far to drive down here from Brighton so I moved down here. I lived in a big apartment building on Wayne State's campus.

Svoboda: Do you remember which one?

Harkness: (Helen L.) DeRoy Apartments.

Svoboda: Oh yeah. It's still here.

Harkness: Yeah, it's still there. I lived on the ninth floor. And I moved to two or three places around here, but I started walking around, I guess I started walking down into the Cass Corridor because I lived nearby. So I would walk south. I sort of started walking south on Third Street. And I did that. I did that a lot. I enjoyed it. I liked it. There was something sort of intriguing and thrilling, the look of the Corridor in those days which would have been 1976, I probably started going down there.

Svoboda: Can you be more specific about that "something" that was intriguing?

2:18

Harkness: I'd heard of the Cass Corridor so it had sort of a reputation as not a dangerous place but sort of a forbidding place to go. It was a long time ago, I've forgotten. A lot of the details are sort of blurred in my memory but just the look. Like walking down Third Street there were these old buildings. I think Third Street was always my favorite. First you'd come to Anderson's

Garden Bar, and I knew that was kind of a prostitute place. I was twenty four, twenty-five years old and I was from the country, and this stuff intrigued me. This was sort of a prostitute hang out, and I'd see people on the streets and these old buildings, just the wood and the stone and the streets. That just appealed to me

Svoboda: As a photographer?

Harkness: As a person and as a photographer. That stuff I just always found interesting. The look and the feel, kind of dark days, which in some of my pictures, I often photograph after a rain, that sheen. This sort of mysterious place, Cass Corridor. The people, the places and wondering sort of what's in these places.

Svoboda: Had you made photos like that before?

Harkness: No.

Svoboda: I assume you shot before you came to school here.

Harkness: I did a little bit. I was drawn to people. I did do a little bit of that. My brother lived in Alaska, and I visited him in Alaska and I remember just wandering around in Anchorage and I somehow ended up in these like homeless shelters where there were alcoholics, photographing them. I don't really know why I was drawn to that. It's just something genetic. Something in me. So I did sort of do that a little bit before I came down here. I didn't just start it, begin it here.

Svoboda: So that was, you said, about '76. How long did you live in this area?

5:34

Harkness: Around Wayne, I ended up in Woodbridge neighborhood, was the last place I lived. I moved out of this area. I moved to Dearborn. I was here in '81 because I was in graduate school at Wayne, so 1983, maybe. There was a job opening with the city of Dearborn as a part-time photographer but at the time one had to be a resident of Dearborn to work for the city.

Svoboda: Would you have left this area otherwise?

Harkness: The time had come for me to go someplace else. I think I was ready to move out of the city.

Svoboda: Why?

Harkness: The thing I remember was I used to ride my bicycle a lot and I was always getting flat tires and I was like there's got to be someplace I can go where I'm not going to be getting flat time. It sounds sort of silly. I liked it down there. I still do. I still come down here a lot but I don't know. I think it was mostly because of that job that I moved, but I don't know if I was getting sort of nervous about living down here. That seems to me to be a little bit of it although I was never one to be afraid, obviously, getting out and walking in the streets. Through the years I lived here I went a lot more place than just Cass Corridor.

Svoboda: I want to talk about those but let's go back to the photo because you started to talk about her.

Harkness: Well, Mary Caffery. So I would venture south on Third Street, past Willis where the Willis Bar was and Selden (Street). And I took some pictures, and there was an apartment building on Third, on the east side of Third Street called the Niagara Apartment. It had three floors and a basement, all with apartments. My best recollection is that Mary used to have two little Chihuahuas. People that lived in the apartment used to sit on the front porch. There were steps that led to the main entrance. It was a long narrow building. And I took her picture. Exactly how I went about that I don't remember but with her agreement. I wasn't one just to snap pictures of people unaware, and as I did many times through the years, I believe I printed the picture and took it back down there, and it didn't take too long and then I went in the apartment. I went into her apartment, her room. And I continued to go there over the course of two years from 1976 to 1978. And through Mary I met a lot of people that lived in that building and I spent a lot of time there. Again, it just intrigued me and I was, again twenty five years old. At the time I worked in Hudson's downtown

Svoboda: You did?

Harkness: Yeah, at the time I worked on the 19th floor which was the floor where all the advertising for Hudson's was done. I was a darkroom tech. They had the photographers, they used to photograph the merchandise, and I'd develop the film and print the pictures, and they'd end up in the newspaper. So I spent a lot of time in this apartment, in this apartment building. It was a heck of an experience for me.

Svoboda: How so?

Harkness: These people were alcoholics, probably all of them. It was just another world for me and the things that went on. I sat with Mary a lot, and we talked, and I photographed her, not all the time. There's really not that many pictures for being down there for two years. I just often visited and didn't take any pictures. It was a wild place as you can imagine.

Svoboda: How so?

11:16

Harkness: People would be drunk, and they'd scream at each other. There were these screaming disagreements. As I said, I got to know a lot of different people. I hung out with different people down there, and I helped them. I guess I helped them, maybe I hurt them. I did little things. There's a little grocery store across the street called Publix Market. This is on third between Charlotte and Peterboro. Publix Market is still there. It's beyond Jumbo's. It's south of Jumbo's. I'd get things for them at the market, probably booze. Although again, it's been so long, it's kind of hard to remember. But I didn't. You OK?

Svoboda: Yeah I'm just losing power on my laptop. I'm listening.

Harkness: I wasn't always buying booze. I'd buy food too. I would run these errands to help out.

Svoboda: With your money?

Harkness: No. I was a student. I didn't have money either. It was usually their money, and I never took any money from them for anything. They had other friends. Some were healthier than others. They had other friends that lived in the building and some people that came to visit them that would get them things at the store. But I remember going to the store and buying things and bringing them back.

Svoboda: What did they think of you?

Harkness: I think they liked me. They were willing to be photographed. I think they enjoyed having company. These were pretty lonely, most of them were by themselves, they were alone. So I think they enjoyed having me there to talk to and pay attention to them.

Svoboda: Do you remember any of the stories they told you or what they talked about?

Harkness: Well, it's been so long. After I'd been going down there for quite a while, this was in '78. I still lived in DeRoy. It just struck me one morning that I'm going to do something. I have something here. I'm going to do something. I can do something with these picture. So I think by that time I had read the book "Let Us Now Praise Famous Men," which was a book. It's a collaboration between the well-known photographer Walker Evans and the author James Agee and they went down south and they lived with three tenant farmers and Evans photographed them and Agee wrote the book. I was aware of that. I had a small tape recorder and I took it down to the Niagara, and I interviewed. I did what we're doing now. I interviewed these people and I asked them to tell me about their lives, and I transcribed all that or segments of it and I put it together into sort of an article. I was still a student, I was a student at CCS, and, I'm sorry, this is a little bit of a tangent here. I printed a bunch of photographs and I had them in a yellow Kodak box that the photographic paper used to come in. I had all these prints in there, then I had a typewriter. I wrote something. It wasn't very good writing but I wrote sort of something about what I did down in this apartment. And I typed it up, it was maybe seven or eight pages, and transcripts of what people said and I took it down to the Detroit Free Press building downtown. This was when you could – I don't know how it is now –you could just go in a building. There was a guy at the front desk, and I hope I don't talk too much detail here, but he said "oh, go up to the fifth floor with that." So I went up and I remember I went into, there was a large, big room, high ceilings, and all these reporters and writers at desks. And there was a guy there sort of at the first desk I came to, he was sort of the head guy, and I said, "I have this material." And he looked at me like, "I'm not interested." That was sort of the feeling I got. I said, "This is sort of current stuff." I said, "It's photographs and some interviews." And he said," Look at kid," essentially, "If you want to you can leave it here, but nothing." Something to the effect of, "nothing's going to happen with this." So I'm like, alright, I'll leave it. So I left. This was sort of a big deal for me. This is a little story once in a while I tell because I remember how this happened. I lived on Hancock on the north end of the Corridor at the time. A couple days later that phone rang. "Hello?" "Mr. Harkness." I had become, suddenly I was Mr. Harkness. "This is so-and-so from

the Detroit Free Press. We would like to publish your article." That was pretty nice for me. They published it. In fact I brought the old dog-eared thing here with me. It was called Detroit Magazine. It was a Sunday supplement. I remember Lou Gordon, his wife is on the cover. But you had asked me if I remember what these people told me. I'm bad in that I did not keep things that I should have kept.

Svoboda: We all do that.

Harkness: We all do. To me, this was like a term paper that you may write for school. This was just, after a few weeks you throw it away. Those interviews, and even those transcripts, I kept them for a long time but they're gone.

19:44

Svoboda: You have the Free Press piece.

Harkness: Yes, so actually in the Free Press piece there is some information about three or four different people that I talked to.

Svoboda: And was Mary, here in this photo, in that?

Harkness: That picture is sort of the lead picture in the article, and also in the article is the first picture I took of her the day I went inside her apartment. She's holding her two little Chihuahua dogs. And she looks much better in that picture that was taken in '76 than she does in this picture which was taken in '78.

Svoboda: Did you realize at the time that you were documenting that kind of timeline and effect on people?

Harkness: I don't know. I don't think so.

Svoboda: When did you realize how much she had changed?

Harkness: I don't remember going there and thinking, Oh, Mary's really. But she was. It was really bad conditions in the building. It was filthy and you know it was just dirty. I remember helping, we cleaned one day. We spent a lot of time cleaning her place and scrubbing it. Cockroaches. It was just infested with cockroaches. Sometimes I was down there at night and we'd sit. We'd sit real still and within a few minutes these cockroaches would just come out. They were just, to my memory, it was almost like the floor was moving. There were just so many cockroaches walking across the floor. Mary talked in an interview about getting cockroaches on her at night. It was really a horrible place and in (19)78 it was abandoned by the owner who lived in the Corridor, and the people, eventually, it was in the fall. My article was published in November of seventy-eight so by that time, people were leaving, the gas was shut off at a certain point. People were sort of left to find other places. And I know one guy, Lee Mullins, who I photographed, he moved to an apartment just south of the Niagara. I helped Mary. There are just so many things. I helped Mary move. But I was very naïve at the time. I helped her move into an apartment north of where the Niagara was, sort of the north end of the Corridor which was a

decent apartment but she was an alcoholic. I visited her there for a while, and the owner of the apartment, I think he had suspicions when I got her in this apartment. I went down there one time and he said, "You shouldn't have brought her here. She's an alcoholic. She's out in the hallways screaming." She moved out of there and she, you know, the timeline is hard to remember. I remember going down there later, and I knocked on Mary's door, and there was no response and I kind of thought she was in there. I went around outside to the south side of the building, and her windows were there. And I somehow shimmied myself up to the window, and I looked in her bedroom and she was seated on her bed, in just sort of a housedress, a smock, she was just kind of falling over, still seated there. It was dark but I could see her, and I don't know if I knocked on the window. I don't think if she got up, again, it was so long ago. I got the window open and I went through the window. She was very sick, and she had soiled herself, you know. She was just a mess. I just sort of did what I felt I had to do at the time. I cleaned her up and then I called the, I think EMS came. I think she might have died had I not been going down there and checking on her. But I remember she went to one of the Detroit hospitals where indigent people went. I think maybe the cast, no, obviously she has the cast on in the picture. That was sort of the later stages. She recovered from that, then there was a place I mentioned, I moved her into. I remember the last time I saw her. I met somebody that knew Mary and he told me, this was quite a while after going down to the Niagara and all this happened. She was in a house somewhere, he gave me the address, and I went over there, and sure enough she was there. It had been a while since I saw her. She went, "Oh, my son my son. She always used to call me her son. I sat with her for a while. She looked a little better. Just getting out of the Corridor and the circumstances she was in. She looked a little better. I visited with her. I was there for an hour or so. I left. I never saw her again. That was the last time I saw her.

26:39

Svoboda: Go back to when her story was in the Free Press, what else was the reaction or the impact of that Free Press story of yours?

Harkness: I got quite a few letters. One of the brothers, I guess, at the Capuchins wrote a letter and said what a good article it was. There were a number of letters, maybe thirteen or fourteen letters. One of the reporters contacted me, a young woman. I went out to lunch, I met her for lunch. She was sort of interested in me. And it got a good, limited of course. One thing, I remember somebody told me that the Free Press never used outside photographers. They had their photographers, well-known names, I can't remember them now. They had assignments, and stories that they did, and they never took in outside photography. And somebody mentioned, just in talk about an award, getting some sort of an award for this story. That never happened for whatever reason.

Svoboda: Did it contribute then to how your career went?

Harkness: I didn't have a career.

Svoboda; You did, the city of Dearborn?

Harkness: I was hired by the city of Dearborn in 1990.

Svoboda: Oh, I thought you said (19)83.

Harkness: I moved to Dearborn sometime, it was probably a little later. Maybe it was 1985. I worked part-time for a couple years under the full-time photographer. I left the part-time job. I worked a for a local newspaper, and then the full-time photographer, who was a very good friend of mine, Bill Schwab, he left and he had been city photographer full-time for five years and he went to be a photographer at Oakwood Hospital in Dearborn. He helped me, and I applied for the full time job. So I was there like '86, '87 maybe a little bit of '88. Bill left. I worked for the newspaper in '90 the full-time position opened up, and I applied for that job and I got that job.

Svoboda: How long did you work there?

Harkness: I was there for 20 years. I was hired there right when Michael A. Guido became mayor. I was there in the old studio when Bill Schwab did the first portraits of Guido. That picture was used for a long time.

Svoboda: I feel like we could do hours on Dearborn too. You've been part of a lot of things happening.

30:10

Harkness: I have. The last picture on here, I just threw it in. It was in '91. There used to be something called Mayor Exchange Day. The Dearborn mayor would go to another city, and that city's mayor would come to Dearborn. There was sort of a routine. The idea was the visiting mayor would maybe get ideas of how things are done that maybe he could use in his city, and in 1991, the mayor to visit Dearborn was Coleman Young. And that was a big deal. If you know the history of Orville Hubbard, that's a whole 'nother story. So as city photographer I covered, I photographed his arrival and all the people, a big banner, "Welcome Mayor Coleman A. Young," and all the people standing in front of city hall which is at Michigan (Avenue) and Schafer (Road) which is no longer city hall, it's now Art Space, the government has moved to a more modern building, and then he went in and I photographed him sitting in Michael Guido's chair in the mayor's office with council people standing around. They're sort of interesting pictures.

Svoboda: Are they on here? (referring to the file of photos Harkness brought and was on a laptop screen)

Harkness: I only put in one, it's the last one, so if you back up. There it is. He went into like a meeting room and employees, he's quite a guy. He wasn't Coleman A. Young for nothing. But he was very pleasant and very dignified. In a lot of these pictures, these people are just sort of, they're just kind of looking at him, standing around sort of, with their mouths hanging open, sort of staring at him. He was this presence. He was there for a while and then they went to what's called a Clean Up Parade. The schools every year, every school had a community pride parade where the kids would march with signs. "Clean Up, Paint Up, Fix up." He rode on the back of a Mustang convertible. So I photographed that. Then he went to a senior citizen home. Then he

went to the Fairlane Club in Dearborn, and they had a lunch, and he gave a talk. I recently scanned. I haven't done anything I haven't looked at these pictures since '91.

Svoboda: Oh gosh.

Harkness: I'm donating a big bunch of my pictures to the Charles H. Wright Museum (of African American History.) I'm giving them complete shared rights. And I thought of these, even though it wasn't really my photography I did in Detroit, it's when I was a city photographer. So I scanned all these and I would like to, I'm really sort of diverging here,

Svoboda: It's fine.

Harkness: I talked to the people at the Dearborn Historical Museum, and I told them about this, and I said, "It would be really neat if we could do something with the Charles H. Wright Museum, have an exhibit of 20 of these pictures and maybe have them somewhere in Dearborn and then maybe at the Charles H. Wright Museum." And actually I've made progress, so far I've got the legal department in the city of Dearborn. It's not a big deal. They've said, "Yeah, we'll sign over shared rights to the museum." So that a step in the right direction.

END OF Harkness Audio 1

START OF Harkness Audio 2

Harkness: The museum said they could probably raise a little funding. I said, "If I can get, I've had exhibits and I pay for, as a lot of artists do, I pay for the ink and the paper and it all comes out of my pocket." Nobody wants to give you any money. But I said f"or this, maybe we could find some organization to donate some money, maybe we could get something from the (Charles H.) Wright Museum (of African American History) just to help me pay for the supplies. I'd be willing to print all these." So that's the Coleman.

Svoboda: That's the progress story.

Harkness: Yes, I have not really talked to the Charles H. Wright Museum about this yet. I have to take them a batch of first set of photographs I'm giving them are my Poletown pictures I did in 1981 of the community that was demolished for the Poletown Plant. So I'm preparing those with captions and titles.

Svoboda: What's the timeline to get everything to the Wright Museum?

Harkness: There's no timeline. It's going to take a long time because I really do, I have a lot of stuff, and they like digital files, and so I have to scan, I have a lot of them scanned, but I have to scan them and I do a little bit of repair because a lot of them, my negatives from that era are, it's like they deteriorated, lots of spots, especially if you blow them up a little bit, spots and scratches, so I clean them up in PhotoShop a little bit but if I do that to every one it's going to take years, and they don't mind as is. You sometimes see museum pictures and they haven't been restores. There are scratches on them. If they want to do that they can find somebody to do that

on an individual basis. Why should I clean up 30 pictures when they just may sit in the digital archive for 20 years and nobody will ever look at them.?

Svoboda: I think people will look at these.

Harkness: These?

Svoboda: Whatever you're sending over.

Harkness: That's up to the museum

Svoboda: So let's look at a few more. You loaded this drive of photos

Harkness: There's 50 pictures. This is the Niagara. This guy's name was Lawrence Godfrey. There were two guys, Lawrence Godfrey and Norman Brandenburg. Norman Brandenburg, there's a picture of Norman coming up, lived in the basement. A basement apartment all by himself. He was in a wheelchair in the back. And he was a very sweet old guy. Very alone, and I visited him, and he was always very happy. He smiled, he was happy to see me and I remember getting things for him at the store. I guess my little story about that is he was hard of hearing, and I wrote, you want to hear all this, Sandra? Alright. I wrote Action Line. Remember Action line? That was a thing in the (Detroit) Free Press. It was on the front page. People would write in and ask, "I need help with something. Can you help me?" And at Action Line there would be somebody who would facilitate it. Like "Help Me Hank" on WDIV.

Svoboda: I don't remember that but I know the kind of thing you're talking about.

Harkness: So I sent a picture of Norman and I said this guy could really use a hearing aid. He's in this apartment in the Cass Corridor. I got a response that they had made an appointment to pick him up and take him to the Detroit Hearing and Speech Center to be fitted for, well, again, I sort of naïve. I think back on some of the things I did and I kind of wonder about myself, but he was a kind of a mess. His clothes were just dirty and stained and crusty. I didn't clean him up or anything. I remember, we got his wheelchair out and they put him in a van and took him to Detroit Hearing and Speech Center. We took him in and there was a woman there and she kind of looked at me like, Geez, you could have cleaned him up a little bit or something." I remember them, I think, just digging wax out of his ears, and I'm just like, duh. But they got a hearing aid, they made a hearing aid for him, and he was taken back to the apartment and a little bit of time went by and I got a notice that the, I don't remember if the hearing aid came to me, it seemed like the hearing aid came to him, which doesn't seem right but somehow the hearing aid, I had the hearing aid and I went down there, and Mary told me she said, "Bruce, Norman died. Norman and Lawrence both died." This is Lawrence. I sort of knew both these guys. Lawrence was really out of it, Norman wasn't. So I had the hearing aid and he died. They found him. It's in the article that they found him on the floor next to his bed, and one of the guys speculated, he used to take aspirin, a lot of aspirin, maybe hundreds of aspirin, I don't know. He said, "His ticker couldn't take it." I remember the quote. But, you know, he died. He was just bad health anyway.

6:45

So this was Lawrence. That's the basement. That's Matt on the left, I don't know the woman. He's the one, Matt's apartment was right here and Lawrence's was down here, way at the end, on the left. And Matt was the one that told me about "his ticker." So those are people, that's how the basement looked, and at the top of those stairs was Mary's apartment, right at the very top on the main floor was Mary's apartment. That's Lawrence. And that's how as I walked in his door, that's how I often found him. He'd be pulled up to the table. He rolled his own cigarettes and he'd have a beer.

This is after the Niagara was abandoned. And I had my big camera. I went in there one day with my big camera, my big press camera, which take four-by-five sheet film. And it was sort of an experiment. It was a mess. The place was detritus. Is that the word? Just all this junk and it stunk, and you know photography, a photographer sort of wants to give order. You can take that path. There's composition and the quality of the light. These are the things that they talk about, and it's hard to go against that. It's like the two same pulls of the magnet. But I was determined, I just set this thing up and I didn't compose. I just set it up and didn't try to compose or make it. I just photographed what was there. I took fifteen or twenty sheet film. Just this is the end of it, you know? This is the end of these lives. This is what is left behind: absolute sordid chaos. Mess. Revolting.

Svoboda: This was what kind of camera?

Harkness: This was like the old newspaper photographer used in the 40s and 50s. You see them with the big flash. The big press camera where they had to put the film holder in, pull out the slide, take the picture, then flip the film holder around. They call it a press camera.

Svoboda: What kind of camera were the other ones taken with?

Harness: Some of those were also taken with a press camera, a four by five. I also used what's called a twin lens reflex. Tow lenses, you look down through the top and the negative is two-and-a-quarter-inches square. So it's medium format. Press camera is sort of medium format. I used 35 mm also. Those negative are an inch by an inch and a half, that's small format. So this is my, I see myself as an early, this is my very, very early contribution to ruin porn.

Svoboda: A lot of photographers would not use that term about their own work, especially in Detroit. You're kind of grinning as you're saying that.

10:24

Harkness: It's been a big thing if you've heard the last couple years. This ruin porn thing of Detroit. So I did it in 1978.

Svoboda: Do you feel like you were the pioneer of the ruin porn thing?

Harkness: Who knows? You know artists have been photographing ruins, I mean painting ruins. In the Civil War there are pictures of Atlanta after Sherman burned it so you know. It's not exactly ruin porn but I guess in a way it is.

Svoboda: You sort of smile every time one of us says "ruin porn" Why is that?

Harkness: I never really liked the term because it's legitimate photography of a city where a lot of things have deteriorated and been abandoned. I guess some of the ruin porn, there's that old force to sort of make it aesthetic, make it aesthetically pleasing. It's kind of a contradiction. Mine I saw as sort of real porn. It's gross. I'm not trying to put a gloss on this. It's just nasty stuff. I've never done anything with these picture. I've never shown them anywhere. Because who'd be interested? Nobody wants to look at that. But for me it's an exercise in. I remember when I

Svoboda: In what? An exercise in what?

Harkness: Well, Bill Rauhauser. Big name in photography in Detroit. I was very close to him when I was a student. He liked what I was doing. As a matter of fact, he advised me when I was preparing this article. I showed him my pictures, and one thing that I failed to do, I like to talk about my failures. I get a lot more satisfaction than saying the good things that I did or equal. But I never photographed the front of the Niagara Apartment. I had not photographed the exterior of the Niagara Apartment. I showed this pictures to Bill Rauhauser and he said, "I think you should get a picture of the outside of the building." So I photographed the side of the building, the long side with all the windows, and it was used in the article. Bill, once he talked about, and he did this for a very short time and then he decided it was sort of silly. Pictures that don't have, what I was talking about, there's no conscious effort to make a good picture, and he would talk about how when you used to have a roll of film, you'd put the film in the camera. And you had to advance it three or four times before you got to frame number one. So you would advance it and you'd click it. And you'd advance it and click it. And advance it and click it until you get to number one and then all of a sudden, then it comes up to your eye and you want to get the composition. So he had this idea that, of using those first three or four pictures where there's no conscious effort to formalize it. And that fascinated me because it's a whole different idea about photography. But inevitably, invariably Bill, you know he kind of said you know, there's nothing there. And what is it Bill says, "The art is in the seeing." That's sort of his, that's his line. So what that means is the value of it is in these conscious, intelligent, artistic decisions to show something, which is what most of his photography is about, and it's very good. But the idea that this sort of thing, it's like,

Svoboda: is that a bed?

Harkness: It's an old bed frame, mattresses, writing on the wall, just junk that's been left behind. Art, if you know, art. What is it that they do? Modern art. What is it, urine? A picture of Jesus in urine? It's kind of like that, this.

15:08

Svoboda: That was composed. This is not composed.

Harkness: It's not consciously composed but the elements are all there. Light. Well, you know, I think if you start digging too deep into what this is about, then you end up spinning your wheels.

Svoboda: Sometimes. This photo. Now we're switching gears a little bit.

Harkness: I also wandered over to Cass Avenue, and I went into the Gold Dollar Show Bar. The building is still there, it's just empty. But it was due east of the Niagara, around the old Chinatown district of Cass Corridor. Again at this time, which was seventy-seven, I discovered a book of photographs by Diane Arbus. And Diane Arbus was a New York photographer who used a twin-lens reflex, square format, and she photographed society's outsiders: transvestites, drag queens, other people, and with just a flash, direct flash, not beautifully composed, not beautiful light, just really raw. And when I first saw that, it just really bowled me over, you know, it just, wow. And that's a little bit like those previous pictures. These aren't pretty. These aren't Ansel Adams. Beautiful things that are gritty in there. I was very influenced, and I think that's one of the reasons why I ventured in to the Gold Dollar Show Bar. It said on the front "female impersonators." That was painted on the front of the building, and so I did sort of the same thing there.

Svoboda: You had just wandered in on your own?

Harkness: I went in. I probably did not have a camera the first time I did although I may have, I may have been carrying my small camera. Somehow photographers eventually get around to taking pictures. And I think that has to do with people like to have their picture taken. It's flattering, and I think I've found that. Maybe not the Niagara but even at the Niagara I think people feel that "someone's paying attention to me. Somebody thinks that I'm worthy or important enough in some way for them to want to take a picture of me." So I think it's not like I have to convince people -- sometimes you do -- to let me take pictures. Especially performers. Yeah, certain amount of ego involved. So before you know it, I was hanging out there and I was photographing in the Gold Dollar.

Svoboda: Go back to what you said just a second ago. When somebody is reluctant to have their photo taken, do you try to talk them into it for lack of a more eloquent phrase, or how do you work with them if you really want that photo?

Harkness: I don't press them much. I'm pretty good. I have good instincts with people. Another project I did later in the late eighties with people, sometimes I, you know, I was going to say you get to know them. You spend time with them, and eventually they'll let you take their picture but that's not really the case most of the time. If they don't want their picture taken, they show no interest, I usually move on. It's the people who initially seem receptive to it. Then if the project is such that it's not just such that I photograph them once and never see them again, then I go back and I've had relations with, become friends with people over a period of time and I photograph them over a period of time.

Svoboda: So, Gold Dollar.

Harkness: That was a fascinating place. Again, it was a long time ago. It was kind of a seedy place, cigarette smoke in the air. I remember they'd go up on stage, it was pantomime. I remember Eartha Kitt playing on the loudspeakers, this gravelly voice and this particular impersonator miming to this Eartha Kitt song and sort of a rowdy, bawdy audience, and people sitting at the bar. Really neat. Neat place.

Svoboda: You have both the performer and the audience in this photo. Is that something you were consciously going for?

Harkness: Probably in this instance. I didn't do that. Again, I didn't photograph there a lot. That's another thing: It's sort of silly to be self-critical but I had a real gem in my hands at this time, but I was 25 years old, which doesn't mean anything. People do amazing things when they are 25. Some artists. But I was a kid with a camera and I'm happy with what I did but somehow I wish I'd been a little bit more aware of what I had, you know, in hindsight.

Svoboda: How so? What do you think you were not aware of that you are now?

Harkness: I guess I think back now of the Corridor as it was and remember so many things that I never took the chance to photograph.

Svoboda: Like what?

22:09

Harkness: I just passed them up. Well, there was the Willis Bar. I have exterior picture of it. I wish I'd gone in the Willis Bar, I think I was a little nervous. I did a lot down there but I was also timid. The topless shoeshine was right next to the Willis Bar, you know, it's like maybe I could have gotten in there, and there were stores along there, Bill's Recreation, Bill's Billiards, I think that's still open on Third (Avenue). I was a little reluctant. I would walk down the street and just some of the little cafes. The Majestic Café was down at the end of the corridor. Chris and Karl's Restaurant. You have these sort of nostalgic memories of these places, but I was not a driven photographer. It wasn't like I knew what I was supposed to be doing and I just did it all the time relentlessly all the time like some photographers do. They're the best. They photograph all this stuff.

Svoboda: So to take my own tangent, Cass Corridor is still a term that's used a little bit, but the whole idea of Midtown has come in. I wonder how you feel about that sort of branding of the area, not only of the Corridor but the surrounding?

Harkness: Well, I don't know. I guess they still sort of call it the Cass Corridor. Again, Sandra, it's changed. It's so different -- most of it -- than when I walked, when I wandered around in the late '70s. It's such a different place now, and I think that's good, it's inevitable. It's a good thing for the city because it was, there were drugs, and it was bad conditions down there like the Niagara. It was fascinating stuff for me at the time but it's not good. It's not good stuff. And it's good that it's being cleaned up and businesses are moving in. I wish them well, but you know it's like I think of Baron Haussman who in the mid 19th century, he was a guy that like redid Paris.

The old, used to be these old twisted streets, and he came in and cleared out the slums and put in boulevards, and you know that's great but I'd sure like to walk through the old Paris. I sort of feel the same way about the Corridor. There was something wonderful about it. Other people think, I've talked to other people It's becoming, I guess with the new stadium, gentrified. Rents, I've heard people "I've lived here, and the rents are going up." That's maybe the downside of it. When I was there it was a little while after the Cass Corridor artists were there and it was the old Cass Corridor. Now it's pretty much a new place. The old Cass Corridor is disappearing. There was another bar people from the Gold Dollar often went over to a place called Verdi's which was on Sibley just west of Woodward Avenue between Woodward and Cass, V-E-R-D-I-S. Just a hole in the wall, cinderblock place but we'd go over there and I photographed in there. It's right where the new stadium is. Sibley is gone. Sibley Street is gone, but that was another dive bar where I hung out for a while, photographed in there. Those places are gone.

Svoboda: Alright, let's go through a few more.

Harkness: I didn't mean to take so long. That's Lisette. Lisette was really my best friend over there at the Gold Dollar. I went to her home. These are all men, you know, I never quite figured out, the sexual, what's it called, identities, it was always sort of nebulous territory for me. These were women to me but then sometimes I would see them as men, and I was kind of "Oh, OK, well I know that but I'm not used to seeing you as a man." But I went to Lisette's home, she invited me, and we had dinner and a man she lived with. She's Cuban, and the guy was Jorge, George. And then a number of the people at the Gold Dollar lived at – I won't be able to remember the name of it, apartment buildings off on like Twelveth Street. I visited over there. There's one picture in here of Ron and Art who were a gay couple. I went and I photographed a number of these people that I met from the Gold Dollar in their apartments but the only picture that I save was Ron and Art in their apartment. Something Courts it's called. It's still there. People still live there. And Lisette, I actually have been in touch with Lisette.

Svoboda: Really?

28:20

Harkness: I had lost touch with her for years and years, but I had a website for a while, and I had some of these Gold Dollar pictures and somebody emailed me and said "My mother knows Lisette. Lisette does -- not Calypso -- dancing, and my mother took a class with her." This was four or five years ago. I did not get in touch with Lisette but when I had this exhibit at Affirmations, I thought how wonderful it would be if Lisette could be there. So I found this woman's email. She was still logged into my email and I kind of plied 'em, and she talked to her mother and she explained that you know, this never comes up about Lisette and her sex but they gave me, and I sort of explained how I'd approach it, and they gave me. Lisette is married and she lives up near Cheboygan. I think that's Cheboygan, it's up here on Black Lake I think it's called. I've been in touch. She sent me some pictures. She looks wonderful. A few health problems with her husband but we've emailed, and I wrote her a few letters, but the thing at

Affirmations, it didn't work out. Had she lived in Detroit area, I may have been able to get her over there for the opening, but she didn't, she wasn't able to come down there.

Svoboda: How old is she now?

30:03

Harkness: She's in her 70s, I believe. She's in her 70s. She's not really young here. I figured out her age and I don't remember what it was. She wasn't in her 20s here.

Svoboda: L-I-Z?

Harkness: L-I-S-E-T-T-E.

Svoboda: Is that her?

Harkness: Now, I think that was Jackie Jordan. You know, this place later, I never went there, but in the 90s this re-opened as rock and roll. White Stripes, I guess, a rock-and-roll venue for a few years.

Svoboda: That's my era here.

Harkness: You remember that?

Svoboda: Uh-huh.

Harkness: Ralph Valdez, a friend of mine from Dearborn, he was in sort of a punk rock band at the time and I guess they played there. He said, "Yeah, it looked like they had the same curtain up there, same old stage." Now it's just empty. It's all been painted. It's just painted brown. I took a picture of it. All the old signs out front are long gone. "Topless go go girls," it said out front. There were never any topless girls in there. It was just those guys.

Now that's the only picture I have in there that was at Verdi's. That was a Halloween party at Verdi's. And that's Ron and Art. Art was the sort of the male performer at the Gold Dollar but he would dress in drag once in a while. I have pictures of him, well, it was the Halloween party at Verdi's where he had different dresses on and this great big blonde wig. He looked sort of like Donald Trump, big blonde wig. But Ron, he wasn't a performer. He just hung out there with Art. But that was in that apartment, which I should have made a note of. It still exists.

This is a building on Selden Street. That's the Coronado Apartment. So you're looking down to Second Street.

Svoboda: This is Second?

Harkness: Second would be north and south. This is Selden. These are the old Jeffries Projects, which are gone now. So you're looking toward Selden Standard, the restaurant. It would be right over here on Selden. There's a bar, sort of a well-known. Jimmy John's, er, not Jimmy John's, Uncle John's is a bar right there on Selden.

Svoboda: Honest John's.

Harkness: Honest John's.

Svoboda: I'm still not used to it being on Selden, I'm used to it being at Belle Isle

Harkness: Is that where it was?

Svoboda: It was on Field. Field and Jefferson

Harkness: I didn't know that

Svoboda: They moved it down here, years ago, but I used to go there in the 90s.

Harkness: OK

Svoboda: Is that the incinerator in this one?

Harkness: No, I don't think so. Whatever it is, I believe those stacks are still there. I think they're on this side of Woodward.

Svoboda: Oh, the power plant?

Harkness: Probably some sort of a power plant.

Svoboda: Where was this taken?

Harkness: Well, I would walk down Third Street. I'm one for, I did it in many projects, Poletown, I would go in abandoned, empty apartments and go to the roof to get these open

End of Harkness Audio 2

Start of Harkness Audio 3

Overviews. So this was a building down Third Street, maybe around Peterboro, looking back northeast. OK? So I took a few pictures from up there. The Niagara would have been just south of this way a couple blocks. That's Third, that's that sort of that dark, after a rain.

Svoboda: Wet streets.

Harkness: Some photographers, it's sort of an appealing, moody. That's the Willis Bar on the left, this was just after the Willis Bar. I have a picture that was taken a year or so before this one when the Willis Bar was open. I was recently contacted. Somebody found the picture of the Willis Bar, it's a sunshine picture. It says "Willis Bar." It was still open, and these buildings were purchased about this time by two guys that, they owned a big flower shop in Birmingham, but they've invested in some properties in the Corridor and they have a branch of their flower shop, Blossoms, now and it's in this building.

Svoboda: It just opened.

Harkness: It just opened. And right next to it, this building is going to be something. And this is going to be a new restaurant. The old Willis Bar. They had an opening of the Blossoms, and I went down and took some pictures. They came to the opening at Affirmations. So, yeah, that's, now that's probably from the same roof, that same building, and this is the Publix market. See the Niagara sat, it's gone in this picture already because this is probably the early 80s. The Niagara was demolished in 79. The Niagara was right there, it sat right there.

Svoboda: On the other side of this house.

Harkness: On the other side of this house. So I used to walk across the street to the Publix market. I think the train station, you can maybe see the train station in the distance. No, it's Wonder Bread, the Wonder Bread factory and right here, barely visible are the lights of Tiger Stadium, the big lights. So that's Third at Peterboro. Yeah.

Svoboda: Who's this?

2:47

Harkness: This is a guy, I guess I did things back then that I may not do now, but this, right across from the Niagara on Fourth Street there was a row of houses that were on Fourth Street so the backs of these houses faced Third Street, and I was wandering around over there one day and I met this guy outside. And he said, he told me, he saw my camera and he said, "I want to, I want you to come in this house with me. I want to show you where I slept on an overturned piano last night." And so, you know, I think I was a little reluctant, but not enough so I went in this abandoned house with him, and he was actually, this picture, he looks sort of like a bad dude in this picture. He has a huge scar, but he was very sweet and he sort of wanted me, he was imploring me to like write an article about him, about his life, which I couldn't. I told him, "I'm not really qualified to do that. I can't really do that." We went in this house and sure enough, there was an old piano turned over on its side. I took a picture of him. He sort of laid down on the piano and showed me how he had spent the night on this piano. How this happened, I'm not quite sure. He took his shirt off, and I just, I don't take a lot of time, I don't pose people a lot. I don't overwork things. He just ended up there and I snapped a few pictures of him. And then we parted, and I never saw him again.

4:57

Svoboda: So he's the first African American that's been in the selection of photos you've taken. The Corridor was a mostly white area, right at the time?

Harkness: I think so. I have some of African Americans in the Cass Corridor but not a lot. I didn't, I went into the Corinth Hotel, which on Second just south of the Coronado Hotel, with a prostitute that I got to know a little bit and I photographed her in a room where she would take johns. I photographed some women on Third Street but I didn't do a lot of pictures of people on the streets. I photographed in the Niagara and in the Gold Dollar and in Verdi's and a little bit of the people I got to know on the streets but I wasn't gutsy enough. I was down there one time and I had a very good little camera. It's a Leica, which is an expensive little camera. I think I was

with a friend, and we were sort of separated but I raised this camera, there were some guys standing over here, and I raised this camera and these guys came over and they kind of surrounded me and they took this camera out of my hands. And they disappeared. So it was a little risky, you know. Often when I came from Wayne State – am I talking too much?

Svoboda: No.

Harkness: When I came from Wayne State like to the Niagara, if I had my bigger cameras, I carried them in a brown paper bag. The Leica, the lens was collapsible. I could put it in my pocket if I wanted to take a picture. I wasn't just out flashing cameras on the street.

Svoboda: Right

Harkness: You're just asking for trouble. But I carried this stuff in a brown paper bag, down to Mary's, down to the Niagara.

7:08

Svoboda: So that's the first time you've mentioned any sort of danger in the Cass Corridor. Was that sort of how the neighborhood felt for you or were you more protecting expensive equipment? What was the balance of that thought?

Harkness: I was always wary. I didn't take a lot of chances. Maybe I had sort of a good street sense, you know. Maybe I was paranoid. Who knows? Maybe I missed a lot of opportunities because of that, as I said earlier, but I was always aware of what, of who is in front of me and who is in back of me, and I would sometimes make a turn just to be on the safe side.

Svoboda: So you were this sort of college kid that was venturing off campus to go to places like the Niagara. Did people ask you about that, or what did people think about you sort of crossing that boundary, so to speak?

Harkness: You mean fellow students or just people, my family?

Svoboda: All of them, I guess. Students, your family, the people you photographed.

Harkness: I don't remember my family saying I shouldn't be doing it. I think they were supportive. I think when I had that article published they were sort of proud of that. Students were, I don't want to sound egotistical because I'm not but I was, I guess I was sort of respected when I was a student and I've even had, recently I had an exhibit, it was a few years ago now at UM-Dearborn: CardioVista. And there was a photographer in the show whose name I should remember. He has pictures in the exhibit now at the DIA of "Detroit After Dark." And he came in there and he said, "Bruce Harkness. I was a couple years behind you at CCS and you really, man, that picture of Mary. That really got me." And now, you know, this kind of photography is passe' somewhat, I think.

Svoboda: Why?

Harkness: We studied the photographers that went out and photographed during the Depression: Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Ben Shahn. You know that's sort of old. That's kind of old hat now. Photography is, you know the Digital Age, it's changed so radically. The stuff now. One thing is big, big big prints. That's kind of the thing now. That's the fashion. The trend and they're so beautiful. They're so perfect, and my stuff is – I admit it. I'm sort of embarrassed sometimes to even bring this stuff out because this was like 40 years ago and it's like "Harkness is dragging out his old Cass Corridor pictures again." And that's sort of true.

Svoboda: But you haven't shown them that much.

Harkness: Well, this exhibit at Affirmations, I actually showed a bunch of stuff that I had never actually printed in all those years. So in a sense it's kind of new but not really. But I. Photography's, locally I don't know. I don't know what I'm trying to say. I mean.

Svoboda: I forgot the question too.

Harkness: I'm not part of the current Detroit photography scene. I did, I went. You know Michelle Andonian. Have you ever encountered Michelle? She's a local photographer. I knew her at CCS. She did quite well and she knows Nancy Barr at the DIA, the curator of the photography department. With a little help from Michelle and on my own initiative, I had an appointment with Nancy Barr, and I took my boxes of prints over there, and Nancy Barr had no interest in anything.

Svoboda: Did she tell you why?

12:06

Harkness: No, and I didn't ask why. She just said, "I can't do anything for you." There are my contemporaries have things at the DIA so I guess it hurts a little bit but not really. I understand how it is. There are other photographers who I greatly admire who have sort of done the kind of thing that I did. I think that I, I'm starting to talk too much about myself, which I don't want to do, but I think that I, I was interested in people and the look of the city and for a set number of years, when I was younger, I went out and I took a lot of photographs, and I think that it is, it has its place. It's not the best. I'm not a great photographer. But I have documented as if we can click on, I have documented significant things in this city and it's not the glamorous stuff. I often go for ordinary. I like ordinary, even in prints. I would rather have somebody look at one of my photographs and say, "What the hell did he photograph that for?" than say "WOW!" I'm a little suspicious of that. I like sort of understated, quiet things that people might not pay a lot of attention to. That's what I like and there's really, I'm not so sure. Maybe it's just bad photography, that's entirely possible, and it's boring. Seriously. That is an option. But people aren't real interested. I've shown my work quite a few places and "no, no no no no no."

Svoboda: So recently you've had some very, I don't know, smaller focused exhibits.

Harkness: Yes. Well, I went to the Hamtramck Historical Museum a few years ago and I said, "I documented Poletown in 1981." Hamtramck was connected with that because the Dodge Main

plant was in Hamtramck, and Hamtramck wanted that auto factory. So Greg, Greg, he's the curator over at the Hamtramck Historical Museum, was interested. So I put together an exhibit of fifty – fifty seems to be my number – of fifty framed photographs from my Poletown project. So that was an exhibit and it got a little press. Michael Jackman (at Metro Times), I don't know if he did that one, but he did a nice thing, a blog on the Affirmations exhibit which was the Cass Corridor photographs. But it got a little press. Greg told me that a lot of people came to the museum to see the exhibit. It's not like pulling teeth but I paid for that. Nobody helped me with anything on that. The museum doesn't have any money. They're trying to get a new furnace, so and then the Affirmations thing. That was through a woman I met when I was part of an exhibit at U of M. Shane Kopitz. She got me, introduced me to Affirmations. But again, it was on my own.

Svoboda: What about the farming? Was it the Detroit Yes farm?

Harkness: The Yes Farm. That was another. I really do have a lot of wonderful stories. I could go on forever.

Svoboda: Tell me about that.

16:28

Harkness: We would come to the pictures eventually here. But between 1987 and 1989. When I did the Poletown project, I did the Poletown project in 1981 when I was a graduate student at Wayne State, and after that, I met a history professor, John Bukowczyk, who I should know exactly what his (specialty is), Polish immigration studies. Smart guy. Went to Harvard. He was interested in my photographs, and he helped me do this set of Poletown pictures. We had an exhibit at Purdy Kresge Library. He got them donated, first to the archives, the Folklore Archive and then later that went to the Reuther. So that was in eighty-two, eighty-three. Then he said, "Bruce, I have an idea for a project. Let's go to the old east side, south of where the Poletown neighborhood was, the south side of (Interstate) 94." The Poletown plant and the old neighborhood was just on the north side of (Interstate) 94). "Let's got there and try to go into people's homes and photograph them and do oral history interviews and we'll call it 'Urban Interiors.'" So this was in eighty-six so I had no job so I said, "fine. Let's try it." I got a Michigan Council for the Arts grant to support this and John got other grants because he was in a good position at Wayne (State). So in eighty-seven I started wandering those streets like I did in the Cass Corridor but this was the Chene Corridor. Chene Street from 94 to Mack, and St. Aubin on the west, east to Mount Elliot, and we did that for two or three years. Pardon me for a moment, I have a paper. I hope I'm not boring you to death.

Svoboda: Not at all. I'm totally fascinated.

Harkness: I have a tendency to do that. I know. I talk.

Svoboda: No you don't.

Harkness: In the end, we did sixty hours of oral history interviews with fifty-one residents of this old east side neighborhood in thirty-six households and businesses. In some instances we interviewed two or three people in the same home. So one place I found was on the fourth of July I was walking down Moran Street, and there was a big building on the corner and there was an African-American woman out on the sidewalk with an American flag, and I asked, I stopped and I had my camera and I ended up taking a few pictures of her. Her name was Estelle Laster. Sister Laster. She lived there and it was kind of a church. I don't know if church is the right word. Like a storefront church. And I got to know here and I spent quite a bit of time over there and got to know a few of her friends and I photographed the place extensively. There was her living quarters and then there was like a community room with tables and there was a chapel with pews, and she'd bought silver paint. She painted it all silver and she was a sweet lady and I tape recorded and interview with her and I even tape recorded her and her friend doing this sort of chant, this very interesting. That project ended in eighty-nine, early ninety and as you do, I lost touch with these people but every once in a while through the years, I go back. That building had been shuttered, you know, it was all closed up and I'd walk around. But one day I was over there, and it looked like there was something going on. There was a piece of paper outside, and it said something about the Yes Farm, and it gave an email address. So I emailed it, and it was this group of urban farmers, artists that had acquired this building in this neighborhood and they were doing art and having neighborhood get togethers and had a garden and exhibits, and I told them and they said, "Oh, look at this." We went outside, and I hadn't noticed it before but above one of the outside doors on Moran Street they had put a picture, a head shot of a woman, and it was one of my pictures that I had taken of Estelle Laster thirty years earlier. I would give prints to people, so apparently a neighbor somehow ended up with one of these prints and they said, "Here, she used to live here." So they copied it and blew it up. It was done with paint somehow or ink.

22:15

Svoboda: And where is that? That's on Chene?

Harness: No, that's on Moran and Frederick maybe. So there were three or four of them around. I talked to them and they were sort of interested in showing. So I said, "I'd like to show the photographs I took in this same space so many years ago." So there were some other photographers in that (show) also. So that was the Yes Farm show. But there's no heat in the place and it was only up for a weekend. It wasn't something where people could just go and take a look.

Svoboda: What other exhibits do you have in your files?

Harkness: Places I've?

Svoboda: What else would you do? What else could you host a collection of that you could do?

Harkness: Oh, I, Sandra, right now I have these fifty. I have fifty pictures from the Cass Corridor all framed.

Svoboda: And those were the ones from?

Harkness: They were from Affirmations, and I would like to have them around here somewhere because this is the Cass Corridor. But I guess I've been, I would just, just for instance I went to Cass Café a number of years ago and I talked to the guy that curates the exhibits there. I just got, I said, "I have all these pictures that I did in Detroit." Again, I think maybe in part it's because it's old stuff, you know. But I didn't get anywhere with that. People are, I've asked different places. I've sort of put the feelers out, and it's like they're exclusionary or they kind of look at you, if it's a gallery and it's, you say, "Oh, I have." And I guess they just sort of think you're just an amateur who wants to put something up, put some of your art in a gallery 'cause I've, different places, like MOCAD. I guess I was foolish enough to go in there one time and talk to them, and I just got the door slammed in my face, which, well, you know. And some of these venues in the Corridor here. I don't know, I just don't have any confidence.

Svoboda: Do you think it's because they're real? I'm searching for the right adjective. Some of your photos are uncomfortable moments in the area.

Harkness: Possibly. I don't know. You know Detroit, maybe it's just my imaginings. As a photographer the reality sort of filters through the mind of the photographers, and they do something to it, maybe. I tried not to do too much of that. I just like point the camera and so I sort of show just things as they are. I don't take a lot of time to light, to use lighting. It's just, it's kind of snapshots. I'm very sort of a democrat. To me photography is sort of the art of the people. We can't all paint but we can all use a camera. I've always sort of kept it on that level. I guess we aspire to be in a gallery but I'm more comfortable showing in a library or a historical museum. I think that's sort of my place. I don't think of myself as an artist.

Svoboda: More of a historian?

Harkness: Yeah, I'm a picture taken. I'm reasonably competent at using a camera and can somewhat compose a picture.

Svoboda: Let's look at some more.

26:45

Harkness: This is Poletown. I was a graduate student at Wayne State. I was tipped off that the entire area, 465 acres, was going to be razed to build a new auto factory. So in February of 1981 I loaded up my, again, my press camera, my four-by-five press camera and film holders and I went over there and I started photographing on February 18th of 1981. And I continued to do it through December of 1981. So I figured it out once, I made like ninety visits over there during this time and every time I would do eight to ten sheets of film. And I wrote down the date of when I took all the pictures. And I also did some with the medium format camera, but I ended up with around six hundred pictures documenting this neighborhood. And of course as time went on, the houses, things started to disappear and actually the project ended, I photographed in maybe November and one morning after that I drove over there. I would go, I would take Woodward usually to the Boulevard and turn right, and it wound around there, crossed

(Interstate) 75, there was a bridge that went over the railroad tracks and then you'd come down, and you'd go, and the Boulevard used to go right into Poletown. I drove down and there was a fence. There was ten-foot or eight-foot high chainlink fence. Since the last time I was there, because I didn't go as often as I used to because there just wasn't anything left. But it had become private. I had for all those months, I went over there and I just went into the heart of the neighborhood and I walked. I've always been a walker. That's one thing about me is I walk. The fence was up. I got in my car. I drove away. That was the end.

Svoboda: Did you take a picture of it?

Harkness: No. I should have but I didn't. Exactly. That's like not photographing the outside of the Niagara Apartments. There's a lot of stuff I didn't do. Don't remind me of it. (Laughing)

Svoboda: Sorry. (Laughing)

Harkness: This was sort of the core of the neighborhood. There was a huge apartment building. This is Chene Street looking south. The Boulevard would have been to my back so this was a big place called the, I forget. But again, I went around back through an alley, and went under a fence and went up, climbed up and got through a window in the back of this big apartment building, the Graylawn. It was called the Graylawn, and I went through a broken window and found a stairwell. It was spooky, all this, this place actually I met people later that used to live here. That lived here. And there are all these long hallways and all these rooms off the hallways but just empty and debris, and I never took any pictures there but I went up to the roof. I went up there four or five times through the course of this project and I would photograph in all directions so the opposite of this would be looking north to Hamtramck, and I did that too so this is from that roof top of that. So is this at a different time on a misty day and that's looking southwest toward Wayne State campus. That's the back of a church. Actually the couple that I met years later, were married, no it might have been a different church. They lived in the Graylawn and they were married in a church that was right along the Boulevard. I'm not sure if that's the back of that church or not.

This was like one of the first days. These were in February. So this is Joseph Campau looking north. On the right there is part of the old Dodge Main Assembly Plant which was already being demolished. Joseph Campau. That was a place called the "Famous Restaurant and Barbecue" right on Chene Street so this would be on the ground floor of that huge apartment building, that big Greylawn Apartment building. Carl Fisher was the owner, owned it for years. I got into an apartment. This really wasn't a people project, it was a landscape and building project but I ended up photographing a lot of people. Somehow I was invited into an apartment building on the Boulevard to photograph a child's first birthday. So these are all going to the Charles Wright Museum (of African American History). They're interested in these. I have twenty or so pictures of people at this birthday party. These are children. This is St. Aubin Street. The span in the background is (Interstate) 94. You can actually still stand in this area. St. Aubin is the western border of the Poletown plant. It's not their property. So you actually, you drive along here now and make a turn, then you can go up and get on Chene Street that way. They were doing, one of

DTE or somebody, they were starting this project, and these children lived in an apartment building there on the corner of St. Aubin and I think it was Trombley, and there was this big deep trench but they were playing there. This is the bridge, the Grand Boulevard bridge that went over. These are the lines, the railroad lines. The supply trains would come in and go over the Dodge Main and unload all their stuff over there. This bridge still exists although it's different now. There's big fences and you don't have those clear views. One of those, I think this smokestack. I think maybe both of these are still there. This building is gone. This is the Urban Interior. So this is the Bukowczyk project.

Svoboda: What happened to those interviews?

Harkness: They exist. These pictures I cannot donate because these belong.

End of Harkness Audio 3

Start of Harkness Audio 4

To Wayne State University. John Bukowczyk, Wayne State University. I don't know if you want to listen to it at some point but I put one of the interviews in here. It's a .wav file. Poletown was eighty-one. This project, Urban Interiors, started in eighty-seven. This is just one of the families that I met, went into their apartment. Again, through my website, three or four years ago I had an email from that little girl who is now a grown woman and she said, "You know, I googled my mother." Her mother was Lilian Guyton. Lilian Guyton and I were born days apart in 1953. I did the interview. I was born the third of June, she was born like on the fifth of June. Her daughter's name is Carlita and the son, I can't think of it right now. But she googled her mother's name and something came up, maybe from my website. So I emailed her back and I think she said, "I remember you." Actually her mother died young. I don't remember what year it was, maybe 1990. She said, "My aunties and uncles, they took all those pictures." So I said, "I have every one of them." So I scanned every one and I emailed them to her, and she was just, "You're a member of our family. Oh, it's so wonderful."

Svoboda: Where is she now?

Harkness: She's in the northern suburbs somewhere. We were going to get together. It just never quite worked out. But they had a beautiful little place on the second floor. It was a little building sort of on the west side of that area, and she had all these what she called "what nots," all these little things that Lillian would put out. That's Carlita. I did individual pictures of them. Carlita Guyton. That's their bedroom. That's, Andre, that's his name. That was Andre's bed, and Carlita's is more of a cot over there. It was an old wood-sided. I have picture of the exterior. By then I had learned to photograph the outside of the buildings because I got a little smarter. This is another, I know I'm just going on and on here.

Svoboda: You're fine.

2:56

Harkness: People get carried away with themselves. If you know history, which I know a little bit, mostly because I've learned it from this. Marcus Garvey was the founder of the UNIA, the Universal Negro Improvement Association. Often they call it the "back to Africa movement," which I guess it was, maybe in the 20s. It had thousands and thousands of members. It was a huge organization. They had the Black Starline Ships, promoted black business. They had these "liberty halls," they were called where they would have these meetings. You can find archival, old photographs on this stuff. But Bukowczyk noted this building, and it said "UNIA Hall." And he said, "Bruce, you know, that would be really cool if we could get in there." So I used to go over there and I'd park and I'd stand there. I'd knock on the door. I'd photograph the building. Often this is how you meet people. If you're taking a picture of something, they sometimes come out and say, "What are you doing?" And then it may lead somewhere. That's a little trick. I walked around the building. I hung out there. I kept going back. Nothing. Nothing. Finally, it's just like "John, I can't penetrate this place. There doesn't seem to ever be anybody here. I've never seen anybody here. Nothing." So a few months later, I had a camera and I was walking on Chene Street, and there was an African-American guy standing on the corner, and he saw me and he was like, "What are you doing?" I said, "Well, I'm working on this project and I'm over here and we're documenting people's businesses." I could see him get, "Oh really." He was interested. He got real excited and he goes, "I want to show you something. Come on. I want to show you something. Come with me." Alright. So I started walking west, down, it might have been Forest or something. Down one street. Down another street. He walked right to the UNIA building. Put the key in the door, opened it up and in I went. (coughs). Excuse me, that's why the water is here.

Svoboda: Is this inside it?

Harkness: Yes, and it's, you know, it's absolutely wonderful. Look at, this guy that I met, his name was Leopold (?), and he lived up on the second floor, and I photographed in there. This was in the office. There were these old. This is probably an old UNIA meeting. These are all UNIA-related pictures. Then Leopold would write these poems, he wrote things and he put them up, these sayings, just sort of his philosophy

6:14

Svoboda: "I can picture every house that a man can make. Getting lost in your love is your first mistake. Word by singer Gordon Lightfoot." Sundown you better take care. Wow.

Harkness: It was just a gem of a place, you know and I eventually was introduced to the elders and I did sort of a a not-very-good picture of them in this office just sort of standing there, but usually it was empty when I was there. I think there are a few more. I just, I love this sort of thing. There's Marcus Garvey. This is the door from the office that led out into the meeting room. This building is, of course, now, it's the corner of a parking lot. We actually – John Bukowczyk interviewed the older man who was the head of this division, and he had met Marcus Garvey. He told how he used to go, Marcus Garvey would come to Detroit to speak and he would go downtown and stand guard for Marcus Garvey. So anyway, the UNIA. You'd drive by

there, you'd never have any idea that this beautiful little building was once there, like so many places in Detroit. This Clara Jozwiak. We met her through one of the Catholic churches. That's one of the first places we went was to St. Hyacinth.

Svoboda: This is the Poletown Project?

Harkness: This is the Urban Interiors Project.

Svoboda: What was her name? Clara?

Harkness: Clara J-O-W-I-A-K. I got to know Clara quite well, and spent quite a bit of time with her, met her daughter and her daughter's husband. Paul Zamarowski, Of course he married Clara's daughter. He had a little barbershop on Chene Street. So I ended up photographing in the barbershop over on Chene Street also. This is another Polish, there was a woman. This is the home of Antonina Shim-Chuk, which I'm not sure, S-Z-Y-M-C-Z-A-K, something like that. She lived by herself in a house, and just down half a block away was her daughter and her daughter's four children. And they were traditional. I was invited for Easter dinner and around Christmas and Mary Ann and her four children would walk down to her mother's home, and I photographed there a lot. That's just a scene. You see what that is on the television screen. That's the plane that was shot down over Lockerbie Scotland. Is that Scotland? So you can date it from that. It was like 19(88).That's what it happened. It was on the news. That's the shell of that big 747. This was around Christmas time.

This is Dan and Vi's Pizza. Dan and Vi's Pizza is actually one of the few businesses that is still open. It's right on Chene near (Insterstate) 94. This area, Sandra, when I was there in the late 80s, when I'd walk up and down Chene Street, there were all these businesses and restaurants, hardwares, barber shops. Everything. This area is devastated. If you've driven down Chene Street lately.

Svoboda: I biked up St. Aubin last summer. We were riding what would be the Inner Circle Greenway Route. So stopping along there, so we rode St. Aubin, under the bridge and up Joseph Campau.

10:22

Harkness: So you're somewhat familiar. Even St. Aubin, those were all homes and businesses. Now there's so little left on Chene Street, a lot of it is just ruins. You know, Chene and Kirby and north of there, it's just, but Dan and Vi's, they've somehow survived.

Svoboda: How do you spell it?

Harkness: D-A-N and V-I-apostrophe-S. And Dan and Vi, they owned it but they sold it at some point. I don't know if I ever really met Dan and Vi. The African-American guy, through somebody else, I met his mother, photographed her in her home with her sons and then I found

out he worked at Dan and Vi's so then I went to Dan and Vi's and he was sort of my invitation, my way in to Dan and Vi's.

That's a guy at a storefront church on McDougall Street. Interesting stuff. This was a tire repair place, kind of in an alley, open, just old falling apart building. This was a guy that lived on Joseph Campau named Johnny Smith. There's Coleman Young. Johnny was quite a guy. He's another person I connected with years later but that was the last time I saw him. He'd moved to the west side, and I stopped and talked to him. He had a very cluttered interior. But very interesting. Sometimes I almost felt a connection between him and Tyree Guyton at the Heidelberg Project. Johnny had a lot of stuff out around his house. This is how he decorated. He's artistic. I remember he said the wallpaper is put up with staples. I mean you see sort of the symmetry, you know, he said, the year 1968 and he's got the Kennedy's and King and the hearth and the fire and dollar. He said "I put these up because I felt it needed something else to balance this." His house is empty now. That's his kitchen. You know, that's why I say I think I have a somewhat valuable collection of documentary photographs from Detroit.

Svoboda: I would say. Who's this family?

Harkness: That's Sherman. Clarence Sherman. Actually, that woman, I met her first: Needa Guyton. She is the sister of Lillian Guyton who lived catty corner on the opposite side. She lived up by (Interstate) 94 on the east side. Lillian Guyton lived by St. Aubin on the west side. But she sent me over to her sister's place. But they lived, Whitesell Court, and she lived with a guy named Clarence Sherman who was quite a guy and their children. And of course, I, Lillian Guyton, when I sent Lillian Guyton the pictures, I guess they saw the pictures, and they were happy to see them again too. This is Cicero Whitlow, and he's the one I have the interview excerpt on this file. He was an African-American guy who lived on St. Aubin. I was driving by one day, and he was out in his garden. As a matter of fact this may have been the first time I met him, and I got out of my car and introduced myself and asked if I could take some pictures. Then I probably took pictures back and I eventually got into his house and interviewed him.

Svoboda: So this whole urban gardening thing isn't new. This is from the '80s.

Harkness: (laughs) Somebody at the Yes Farm, they commented on that. He talked about his garden, how he used to sell corn. People would stop here and buy corn. "I'd tell them, 'go pick it yourself. Go pick it thyself.' "This is St. Stanislaus, which is the big double-spired church you see from(Interstate) 94, and I photographed in it and in the rectory, which is now, the rectory is a ruin. It faces west, but this was in like July of eighty-nine, and the Archdiocese, a month later this church was closed by the Archdiocese, so this was probably the last (wedding). There's a photographer down on his knee photographing the bride and maybe her parents walking up the aisle. That might have been the last wedding held at, and that was a major Catholic church in that area, all those years, all those people lived in that neighborhood. Then there are a lot of pictures, just people I met along the way, you know, just snapshots.

Svoboda: And this is all the Chene Corridor project?

Harkness: No, this isn't. This is very early on, even before Cass Corridor. I had an assignment when I was a beginning student at CCS, I took a documentary photography class with Bill Rauhauser. The project, we worked with the Detroit Historical Museum. They came up with the theme of neighborhood, different sections, and I photographed the Mexican neighborhood down by the Ambassador Bridge. What's that called?

Svoboda: Southwest Detroit.

16:27

Harkness: Southwest Detroit. That was sort of my area. This was probably 1975, when I was, again, that's when, I guess that's when I started just walking around. That was probably my first foray into the neighborhoods, and these were just two girls that I met. I always thought they were very sweet, gentle, the way she has her hand. This one seems, she seems a little shy, behind, with the hand and the other one just seems like she's the one who's really sure of herself.

This guy's actually been a friend of mine for years, John Young. He went to Wayne. I met him when we both waited tables at Union Street. I met him, and he lived on Selden (Street), as a matter of fact, that night time roof shot looking down was from the roof of this apartment building. He lived on the third floor, and we became good friends, and I photographed him quite a bit, and this was his partner at the time, Darrel Chifarelli. We hung out, went to breakfast, went to restaurants. John was very spiritual, Catholic, purest soul I've ever met, I think, just a very good person, and in the spring he ended up after traveling many places, he ended up at Mount Savior Monastery near Elmyra, New York, and in the spring I went and I photographed his solemn vows. He's a monk in this place, beautiful place. That was the last time I saw him. He went through that ceremony. A lot of his friends and family were there. It was very nice. We've been friends for years. These are just, that's a neighborhood around Grand River (Avenue) and Buchanan and Fourteenth Street. I don't know exactly what's there but heading into Detroit. Just another neighborhood I wandered over that way and kind of got to know people over there, so I did some work over there, just street portraits. That's that same area, just kids, kids up on an upper porch. This was actually a woman I rented a room from, Della. Della and Dalbert David. His name was Dalbert. The father, I never, he was long gone.

Svoboda: And where was this taken?

19:17

Harkness: I lived on Commonwealth Street. After I left, I lived on Hancock. I went from DeRoy to Hancock to Commonwealth. The corner of Commonwealth and Warren, I lived with a bunch of my friends that I went to school with. I was there for a few years and then I moved three doors down and I rented her upper flat. Also, in '97, I, with some friends, we started going to all the blues venues. The old Soup Kitchen Saloon, what was the other, Woodbridge Tavern. This was Attic Bar.

Svoboda: That's the one I was trying to think of. Up on?

Harkness: Joseph Campau. North Hamtramck. This is Uncle Jesse White, who played there for years. I photographed national (acts), Junior Wells, a lot of nationally known blues figures as well as local guys. Willy D. Warren at the Soup Kitchen Saloon. I have a pretty substantial collection of all these. These will all go to the Wright Museum eventually too.

Svoboda: And back to Coleman.

Harkness: And back to where we (started). So I got the job and I left Detroit. Actually during the Urban Interiors Project I was living in Dearborn for a while in eighty-seven. Maybe I moved there later than I thought.

Svoboda: So I'm going to ask the question again. What would be the next, if you could pick your dream show, what would you spend your time going through your collection curating?

Harkness: I guess I would like to have an exhibit of a lot of my pictures. Of all these projects, just to sort of show the breadth of what I photographed.

Svoboda: What part of Detroit history do you think they tell?

Harkness: You ask me tough questions. Um. You mean sort of aspect of the city. I don't know.

Svoboda: The people? The city, the people, the conflicts?

Harkness: I don't think conflicts so much. It's sort of a cop out but the look of the city at a certain time and the people that lived here in the late '80s. The conflict, I guess Poletown was a conflict. That was very much in the news. There were big battles over the city taking this neighborhood. But I wasn't, you know, I didn't really have a point of view. You know, I wasn't saying "oh this is horrible," I just photographed it. I just sort of documented. It was sort of sad, what happened over there, I knew people that died that maybe the stress got to them. The pastor of the big Catholic church who really fought the project and the rallies, a lot of them took place around the Immaculate Conception Church, he passed away not long after. But you know, I don't know.

Svoboda: When you come down here and you go through the Corridor, what really strikes you? Do memories come to the forefront?

Harkness: Yeah, they do. They do. I probably sort of dwell on the past more than is normal.

Svoboda: Well you documented it.

Harkness: Yeah, I documented it, but I think it's sort of a family. My eldest brother, he lives in Mississippi now but he likes to come back to Detroit, and we'll go, he'll take me to places where he used to live. As a matter of fact, I've got to tell you this, another story. On Marston Street, it's off Woodward, six or seven blocks north of the Boulevard. When my brother, who was born in 'thirty-nine, was a little boy, he lived with my parents in an apartment building on Marston Street. So we'd drive over there and we'd park across the street and, you know, there are four. There's the main door, two uppers. He said "that was our window up there. That's where I lived

there." We went there. Then I got an email from him eight months ago and it said, "Go over there and tell them I'll pay them $100 if I can go in there." I was like,, I don't know, that sounds sort of odd. I was down here a month ago. I forget why I was here, I went to the DIA or something. No, I met my friend Bukowczyk for lunch, I hadn't seen him in a long time. I said, "I'm going over to Marston Street. I'm going to see if I can get in an apartment over there." I told him about my brother. I went over there, parked the car and I walked up, stood in sort of the outside vestibule there and then I walked back to my car, and then I saw a guy come out and he walked over to a van parked in the street. And another guy came out and he was like saying something to me. So I walked back up to him and I said, "You know, my brother, when he was a little boy, used to live up there." And the guy was like, didn't really want to hear what I had to say. But I said, "Yeah, he was, he'd really like to see that in there." And he said, "Well, somebody lives there but she works nights." And I said, "Yeah, my brother said he'd give somebody a hundred dollars." "Oh, well, my niece lives up there. I think she'd be interested in that." Is this sort of silly or what?

Svoboda: No, I'm waiting. Did your brother come back?

26:08

Harkness: So she came down the stairs and I explained, you know, I mean, I wasn't acting as crazy as I am now. I said, "My brother, when he comes to visit, we come over here. He used to live here when he was a little boy. He told me he would pay a hundred dollars." She said, "OK." She was very nice. I can't think of her name right now but I took her phone number and I said, "Let me call my brother again and make sure he's OK with this." And I followed up right away with her, I didn't want to leave her hanging, and I called her, I said, "Yes, he's still interested." So he's coming here for Thanksgiving, so I've made arrangements, I guess it's the day before Thanksgiving. Wednesday. He's coming in Tuesday. Wednesday we're going to go over there, and he's going to see where he was when he was three or four years old in the early 1940s.

Svoboda: Wow.

Harkness: (laughs). So he likes to come to Detroit and go to the old place. My dad grew up in a little house on Fifteenth Street, over by Buchanan and Fifteenth. I actually have a picture that my brother took of my dad standing out in front of his house where he lived when he was a little boy. The house was empty, and we went in it, and my dad showed us where his bedroom used to be. He likes to go back to these old places. My brother has researched our family a lot so he sort of knew where people lived.

Svoboda: So what did his research find?

27:49

Harkness: He traced our family way back to like the 1600s.

Svoboda: Here?

Harkness: Scotland.

Svoboda: How did you end up in Detroit?

Harkness: Me?

Svoboda: Your family.

Harkness: My dad came through Canada. There's a Harkness Street in Sarnia named after my great great great grandfather who was a chief of police or something. So he came to Detroit. He was here with his father. His mother died quite young so he was here with his father, and then he met my mother in Detroit. She was an elevator operator, and he met her and they were married but it took a long time. I think they were married in thirty-nine. My mother was born in 1910 so she was 29 years old. So they settled in Detroit. They had that place on Marsten and then Smith Street which is very near Marsten. I remember our family in the sixties, we used to go, right by Smith and Woodward there was a row of businesses and there was a little Chinese restaurant run by Old China men called the Coconut Grove and we'd part there on Pallister and we'd go into this. I still have a vivid memory. There were tables and then there was sort of a divider with this shiny dark wood and beyond that were the booths with the little lamps on each table. Dark. We'd go in there, and the old Chinese waiter would come up. Chester Dong was him. You can still look this stuff up in the City Directory. We have, of course. So they lived there and then they moved to Redford Township, and we lived in Redford Township for quite a while, and then my mother, who was sort of an adventurer found this old farmhouse out on Kensington Road, halfway between Brighton and Milford, so we moved there when I left elementary school. We moved there in sixty-five or four.

Svoboda: Was it a farm?

Harkness: it was a farm. When we moved there there were big barns. It used to be a farm, yes.

Svoboda: But you didn't farm?

Harkness: No, we didn't farm.

Svoboda: What did your father do?

Harkness: His main thing was he built custom sink tops. He had a shop very close to the Redford Theater. I used to go to work with him on Greydale and they'd send me over to get coffee at the little confectionary right near, right next to the Redford Theater. So I'd get coffee and doughnuts. My dad, he'd have plywood, then he'd put this Formica, with the glue. He'd measure the job, measure the counters, and so he did that, it was his main thing. But he taught me to lay tile, 12-inch tile so I did that but that's what he did and he used to, he did that for a while even when we lived in Brighton he would commute, so that's what he did until he retired.

31:07

Svoboda: So when did you know you wanted to be a photographer? How did you decide to come to CCS?

Harkness: I started in high school and I was sort of challenged by the photography teacher. I think probably I didn't really apply myself and I said, "Oh, I could do better if I wanted to," and he said, "No, you can't." So I tried harder and I liked it. I sort of took to it. I guess I had a little bit of an eye, you know. I remember my parents and I, we went on a trip east and I photographed old churches and stuff and I had an exhibit of those pictures are Brighton High School in the showcase. It wasn't bad photography. I sort of focused in on something. There was like a central thing there so I sort of took to it. I actually started off in special education at Michigan State but I ended up spending most of my time in the Camera Club darkroom. So then I decided, I think my brother, who I referred to, he mentioned I should go to this art school in Detroit so we looked into that and then I, so it was three or four years between high school and when I finally started at CCS. I graduated high school in seventy-one, I started at CCS in 'seventy-five.

Svoboda: You mentioned earlier that worked at Hudson's. Can you tell me a little about that?

End of Harkness Audio 4

(There was a break in the interview)

Start of Harkness Audio 5

Svoboda: OK, So we'll resume. I want to ask you about Hudson's a little bit. Such an iconic, Detroit. I didn't grow up here but I quickly learned what Hudson's meant to the city. You mentioned you were a darkroom technician?

Harkness: Hudson's, yes. It was a big department store in downtown Detroit. Of course I used to go there with my ma when I was a little boy. She'd shop there as so many people did. Svoboda: How did you get the job?

Harkness: Well, right after I graduated, I still had like one class to make up to get my degree at CCS. So I think in '78 I was pretty much finished at CCS and I found out, somebody told me that there was a darkroom position opening at Hudson's, and the main guy's name was Dick Syzdek. S-Y-Z-D-E-K. So I interviewed and got the job. And it was on the nineteenth floor and my college sweetheart, whose name was Bonnie Detloff, who I'd met at CCS, she was in graphic design, and she also got a job on the nineteenth floor, another section of that floor where all the illustrators and designers were, you know. We did the photography and then they laid it all out and put it in the paper. So we would, I don't remember how it worked. She lived in the suburbs with her parents. Maybe she'd pick me up and we used to drive down and park in one of the parking lots down there. I remember walking up to the back of Hudson's and we'd go in the employee entrance, maybe the doors were open, and get on the elevator. There was somebody in the elevator at the time, an elevator operator, pull the big gate, the metal gates closed, go up to the nineteenth floor and she'd go to her place and I to mine. And there were a number of photographers, there was a pretty good crew there, and I was just up there. I had a little darkroom. I developed all the black and white film and I made prints, made enlargements. They

were then transferred into the ads that used to appear in the News and the (Detroit) Free Press for Hudson's.

This is the same time I was going to the Niagara Apartments. I remember when that thing in the Free Press was published, that was, you know, I was like big man on campus for a few days. You understand that, you know, It was like "Bruce got this article," and I remember the people in the advertising department, the design department took the article and they put it on a board, you know, "Hudson's Own" I forget what they put. "Bruce." They wrote things, then they presented me with that, so that was kind of nice. But I was just there for one year. I stayed there one year and I quit. My dad was made at me because I quit. I think it was another stupid thing I did. I think I was due to get a paid vacation and I quit right before I got my paid vacation.

3:50

Svoboda: Why did you quit?

Harkness: I just didn't want to do it any more and I don't remember exactly why. I had a best friend. There was a group of us at CCS who were not interested in commercial photography. One guy was Paul Runyon. His father as a vice president at Ford Motor Company, a big wig. Actually got me a job one year, one summer at the Wixom plant so I could earn money for school. So he was a very good friend, and then I had another guy whose name was Brian Weisberg. He was a little guy, and he had a heart defect. He had a congenital heart defect. Kind of a pointed chest, skinny little guy but a real cut up. We had really good times. We'd laugh a lot, and be bad, but we were all interested in photographing people. Sort of art photography. And I remember when I was at Hudson's Brian died. I had a call. He has a twin brother. Arlan Weisberg. He called. I had a call somehow through, I think maybe he had my number in the photo lab. He called me and he told me. I had visited Brian just a few days (earlier). Brian, he had to go into the hospital. We had this thing where Brian initiated it. We'd shake hands and then Brian would kind of, he'd sort of look at his hand and then he'd kind of (laughs as he demonstrates)

Svoboda: Wipe it off?

Harkness: He'd kind of wipe it on his shirt. I remember being with Bonnie, my college girlfriend. We went to visit Brian in the hospital and he walked us to the elevator. And we shook hands, and of course we both looked at our hands and then the elevator door closed and a couple days later he died. He had some sort of massive heart attack and his brother called me and told me. But Brian, it all ties in. After Brian died in '78, his parents gave me his press camera. So it was Brian's press camera that I used in Poletown and I was in touch with Brian's brother. I sometimes meet him at Machpelah Cemetery. Kaddish, do you know that? It's something the Jews say at a grave. So on his birthday every year since Brian died his twin brother is at his grave and says Kaddish, so I've been to that a few times. But he came to the opening of my Poletown exhibit in Hamtramck and I had to give a little talk and I started off by talking about Brian and how his parents gave me the camera that I used on this, and his brother was moved by that. So that's sort of what happened at Hudson's.

Svoboda: What happened to Paul Runyon?

Harkness: Paul Runyon went east. He was in Albuquerque New Mexico for a while at art school, then he went to Philadelphia. He was in New York. He was sort of a privileged kid, and he was an intern at a gallery called "Light Gallery" which was in the early '80s was a big photography gallery when people were actually starting to put money into art photographs. He was an intern there and he actually, I bought a photograph there by a guy named Harry Callahan. He's sort of on the level of Ansel Adams, a contemporary of Ansel Adams. He was actually a photographer at GM for a while. He's very well known if you study the history of photography. He has kind of a famous picture he took of trees in snow on the lakeshore in Chicago with Lake Michigan in the background. It's very stark. I paid like a couple hundred dollars for this print, and I had it all these years, and Callahan has died and it's worth varying amounts depending on, what do they call it when they know where a work of art has been? There's a term for that.

Svoboda: Provenance?

Harkness. Yeah. I don't have a receipt I would just say I bought it. But one sold at Sotheby's for $30,000 at auction. Bill Schwab, the photographer who had the job at (Dearborn) city hall first, I saw him one day and he said "Your Callahan. I was going through the Sotheby's website and 'Trees in Snow' sold at auction for thirty thousand dollars." I've seen it for like fifteen. So it's worth something. I've considered selling it. So what was the question?

Svoboda: What happened to Paul Runyon?

Harkness: He stayed in the east. He's at Drexel, he's in the photography department. Sort of the head of the photography department. But I lost touch with him.

Svoboda: So then you went to the city of Dearborn as their part-time and then full-time photographer. I guess the big question is, what was that like? But that seems silly.

Harkness: No, No more silly than all the stuff I've been talking about for the last hour and a half. You know I was – I'm not good at math – I was not a young man any more. I was born in '53. This was the late 80s. My dad died in eighty-nine, and of course, my dad was like, "Ah, Bruce." He was worried about me a lot, and right after my dad died, I got this job, it opened up at the City of Dearborn. So I got this job in 1990, and it was wonderful. Because I had bought this building in Dearborn on Tireman and Chase Road. It didn't cost much. It was $34,000, my mother helped me, gave me some money. I lived up above, had sort of a studio on the ground floor, which was sort of a neat place. But you know, I had plans on renting it, but things just don't work out sometimes, and I was getting sort of worried and then Bill decided to go to Oakwood Hospital, and I got this full-time job. And on top of all this, I'm a Type I diabetic. I've been diabetic since I was ten years old, 1963. Bad year for John Kennedy and myself. And I had no health insurance at all, but when I got this job, that was back when, you know what they say about government jobs. The pay was OK but it had wonderful benefits, so I got health insurance and to this day, even though I've been retired for six years, I am very, very fortunate. I pay nothing. I have a small co-pay on prescriptions. So blah blah blah.

11:52

Svoboda: What was it like to go from sort of a free-spirit photographer to working for the city?

Harkness: Well, there's still a little bit of free spirit there because unlike other employees, most of the employees at city hall, they're in their department with their boss, they have this thing that they have to do. I had a lot of freedom. The mayor would call me up to his office when he had guests or "Bruce, go. We need picture of tennis lessons or people at the pool." So I was able to go out. I could leave and just go out and take pictures during the day. Of course, that was back in the day when we had darkrooms and developed film and all that stuff. It was really wonderful, it was pretty nice. I actually remember, people don't understand that. Maybe some do. But I actually went to a store and I bought, this was right after I got hired, and I bought an electric razor and it's like I just went in there. And I picked it up and I paid for it and you know, before that, always you're worried about spending money. It's like, oh boy, I can't have this, I can't have that. Just being able to do that, I just, I bought that thing, that little thing for twenty five or thirty bucks but I just gave her the money and walked out with a smile on my face. I always remember that. It just sort of changed my life. You could actually. That's why work is so important for self esteem and well being and being able to pay your bills for so many people. People are devastated by not. It ruins lives, not being able to do what you want to do. So it was good.

Svoboda: Do you remember your first assignment with the city?

Harkness: No. But when I go back through the negatives, now, it used to be a city hall but now they're at the Dearborn Historical Museum. When city government left the old city hall, I volunteered to move what was still left of the photo lab to the Dearborn Historical Museum. So I was in charge of moving all the negatives. There are five-by-seven manila envelopes. Thousands and thousands of them because the city always had full-time photographers, back to the late 1940s. So you know. Everything. You would go out almost every day and photograph. Hubbard. The other day I was scanning negatives when General Douglas MacArthur visited Dearborn. So.

Svoboda: You have all those?

Harkness: I have access to them in the historical museum. And I can go through those envelopes and all of a sudden on an envelope in about 1987, there's my (handwriting). On the envelope you'd put the assignment and the date. What the subject is and the date. All of a sudden my handwriting appears. So I could actually tell you what the first assignment was. I was very busy. (Mayor Michael) Guido died a young man. He was a year younger than I was at the time. He died ten years ago in 2006. And then digital photography came in. So the department started taking their own digital pictures. They didn't need me to have the film, develop the film and make the prints. And then we had the new mayor, John O'Reilly. And you know Guido was very picture-oriented. PR (public relations). I was always going with him taking pictures. I think it was a plan, you give these pictures away, "Compliments of Mayor Guido." Then "I'm going to vote for this guy again. He's got to stay mayor because I've got my picture with him." But

O'Reilly was very different. In the six, four years that O'Reilly was mayor, not once, I never went to the mayor's office again.

Svoboda: Really?

16:27

Harkness: Guido used to have guests come in and he'd call me up to take these comp pictures with these people. O'Reilly's just a different animal. Different guy. Didn't need pictures. Two weeks after Guido died, I got permission to go in his office and I said, "I'd like to go in there." Because it was still the way he left it. So I went in there and I documented his office before they had to clean it out, so I have those pictures.

Svoboda: What did they do with those?

Harkness: All that stuff?

Svoboda: All the pictures.

Harkness: They're digital by that time. I have them in digital form at the museum.

Svoboda: How did digital change your work?

Harkness: Oh, it was a great. I still love, I thank god for digital. I remember a guy coming down to the photo lab that worked at City Hall in the Housing Department. Sharp guy. He sort of knew what you could do with digital photography and he started telling me and I'm just like, "You're kidding." It's like you'll be able to, there's no darkroom. I spent a lot of time in the darkroom printing all these pictures. He said, "You'll be able to sit out here in the light. And you just put a card, you take a card in the camera, and they just come up on the, and you can, you don't have to make prints and drive them to the newspaper. You'll be able to just email." And I'm like, "What?" But it all came true, and I really liked it. There's so much more that you can do with digital.

Svoboda: Did it change how you shoot?

Harkness: Not really. I still shoot pretty much the same and now I'm digitizing my old negatives so they're becoming digital and these prints are all ink jet. There's nothing in the darkroom any more. I've always like digital. The good old days in the darkroom were fun but I was happy to see them go.

Svoboda: How much do you shoot now? It sounds like a lot of your projects are the digitization.

Harkness: I don't shoot a lot. I go down to these old neighborhoods sometimes, like Chene, and I've photographed some of the old buildings that I went into and photographed. But I'm not really involved in that any more. I do freelance for the city. But it's mostly going over my old stuff and sort of digitizing it and repairing it and having a few exhibits where I can.

19:37

Svoboda: So kind of your main thing right now is getting your work ready for archiving at the Wright Museum? Is that fair to say?

Harkness: That's kind of my project right now. There's this woman I met, that's in where they keep all the archives at the museum, so I'm working with her and I go down there every once in a while and we look through pictures and she says "Oh, I like this. I don't want that." So she made a selection of my Poletown pictures and I'm currently finishing up those and I'll move on to something else.

Svoboda: With them, with the Wright?

Harkness: With the Wright. I'd like to do something with these Coleman Young pictures. I'd like to have a little exhibit of those. I think they're kind of interesting.

Svoboda: The Dearborn day?

Harkness: Yes. Mayor Exchange Day. I photographed in, I wandered around in Brush Park in the same time I was in the Corridor and I photographed a lot of the old mansions there, and you know people find me every once in a while. I was contacted by, remember last year the Ransom Gillis House was, it's a well-known house on the corner of Alfred and John R. It had the turret on it. I photographed it in seventy-six, and what's the, Rehab Addict. What's the tv program?

Svoboda: I think it's Rehab Addict. I know what you mean.

Harkness: Well, they decided to do the Ransom Gillis House and they found me somehow and contacted me, and I sold them picture that I took and they appeared on that. If you watch the first episode, in the first five minutes of the first episode of the renovation of the Random Gillis House, these black-and-white pictures will come up and those are mine. So every once in a while sort of neat little things happen.

Svoboda: Anything else like that you can think of? When we went through the pictures you mentioned some of the people that have found you.

Harkness: Quite a few of the people and that's sort of thrilling. The Ford Foundation, they were looking for something to do, I don't know if it was African-American, small business. They were running something for a couple months, probably some sort of online promotion and they bought one of my photographs. I've actually. There was a guy, the only other interview I've ever done, there was a guy, I think he's in Scotland and he's doing a PhD thesis on photography in Detroit and Chicago. He was here a few years ago and he interviewed me at Wayne State, so that's happened. Every once in a while little things, people that somehow find me who have a need for kind of places I've photographed in that era, and they use the pictures.

Svoboda: Alright. I do want to see some of the other photos you brought. Is there anything else you want to talk about or we haven't covered that you thought I'd ask you. I'm sure we'll both think of things.

Harkness: That's how it always is. I've thought, you just hear, I've heard a lot of comments through the years about Detroit. "I wouldn't go. You go down there?" And people don't. A lot of people are afraid, I guess, of the unknown, and they don't go downtown. They won't go. I remember, it's vulgar but going out to my dad's house, my parents' house in Brighton, and my dad had a friend and he knew, he said "So how's everything in Niggertown." And I'm just like, "Ugh." But it's just kind of, that's how some people think but not wanting to go into the city and you know, I did and I met a lot of wonderful people. Ordinary people. Like me. But I got to know them and their lives are fascinating. Just the things that have happened to them in their lives and the things, their homes are interesting, valuable, and it, those people, they're still with me. That is sort of, they sort of make you the person that you are. If you're afraid of everything and you won't take a chance, then there's something you're missing. But if you, you know, this, you can apply this to a lot of different things – skydiving, I don't know – but I was willing to take a little bit of a chance and it turned out well for me. Through the years I saw a lot of interesting places and I meet a lot of wonderful people that I never would have met without a camera. The camera is like, I always believe it's like a magic wand, it's like a magic tool. Just walking around, other than money maybe, just walking around you can talk to people, but when you have a camera, that somehow unlocks doors if used with sensitivity and it's like not pushing a camera in somebody's face, and it's like photographing them with respect and giving them pictures and it is, it's a good tool.

26:27

Svoboda: What do you think when you see all of us with our Smartphones and selfies and people taking pictures all the time but not necessarily the same art or meaning?

Harkness: It's just the way it is nowadays. It's such a common thing. It's the Digital Age. It's OK. I guess I don't do it. I've never had a good cell phone, I still don't. There are a lot of good, It's like I said, it's a democratic art form, you know, everybody can do it and they do it with their cell phones now and they're just preserving these little, these memories so that's a good thing.

Svoboda: It doesn't minimize your profession?

Harkness: Oh, I don't know. Maybe it does because there's just such a proliferation of it. I guess it used to be certain groups that did this and it was a skill, and now it doesn't require as much skill, I guess, to take these pictures so it's the nature of photography's changed. I mean there's still serious photographers. Art photographers who I don't really relate to, I don't think.

Svoboda: Did you ever try to become a newspaper photographer?

Harkness: No, that's another thing my dad was mad at me about. Maybe there's some psychological thing here. I had that article in the Free Press, and my dad was rather upset with me, he perceived it as having a foot in the door. And I didn't have a job. "Why didn't you try to go down there? You could have maybe gotten a job as a newspaper photographer." But I was lackadaisical. I don't know what the word is. Not really ambitious. Even the Poletown project, I wasn't really aware. I think I had heard something about that. But I shouldn't admit to these

things, but this is the truth. I had heard about it but it didn't really kick in. I had a friend at Wayne who now is sort of the head of the photography department at OCC – Oakland Community College – Nick Valente. He was at Wayne the same time I was. He said, "Bruce, they're going to demolish this whole neighborhood. Let's go over there. Let's do a book. Let's photograph over there." I'm like, " Well, OK." So the first couple times I went, I went with Nick but Nick didn't continue it. Maybe he had to drive to the suburbs, I don't know. But had it not been for Nick getting me over there, I may never have gone, so. Cass Corridor, I did that on my own. But often I've needed to be directed. I needed somebody to push me, show me something.

30:03

Svoboda: Your pictures of the Corridor are, and I don't mean this in a negative way, but they're limited. They're very specialized to a few places. What else is out there, whether they're photos or writings or whatever it is, that tells more stories, different stories about the Cass Corridor at the time?

Harkness: Well, you know, I don't know if there are. There are other photographers, if that's what you're referring to. There's some guy, and I don't know these people, but there's somebody that lived down here at that time, preceded me somewhat, maybe in the sixties, and he photographed some of the artists in the Corridor and things in the Corridor, but I've never really seen like a body of work that's kind of like mine, of anything. Like if you google "Cass Corridor images," a lot of pictures come up but it's kind of this and that, just, so you know I think there's writings. There are a lot of artists involved in the Corridor, so I don't really know what else there is. I would guess that, I mean maybe your class is finding, there are certainly other people to interview. At Affirmations, Charles, an older man who I used to see when I lived down here, I used to see this guy walking around on his own. I used to, I've gone to the Detroit Film Theatre for years. I started going to the Detroit Film Theatre right when it started in the mid seventies, and I used to see this guy. He has an affiliation with Affirmations. I showed him my pictures when I was trying to get this exhibit there. He said "You know, I used to live on Peterboro. I was a little boy. I grew up right there, is it the Burton School, which is at Cass and Peterboro." He said, "I lived right around the corner from there." So he remembers the Corridor through all those decades when he lived there.

Svoboda: One of my friends who also lived down here at the time said there were not a lot of children that grew up in the area.

Harkness: Maybe before it started to go downhill, maybe there were more then. Because I think at one time, it was a normal neighborhood. Like Brush Park was for the gentry, for wealthy business men, then it broke up into rooming houses and got sort of bad.

Svoboda: Alright, well thank you so much.

Harkness: That was my pleasure. That was fun.