

JAMES JENKINS

In 1941 I got to be a bus driver on a streetcar, and I went all over this town. I remember driving a bus on West Seven Mile Road when it was a two-lane road. The big migration didn't cross Six Mile Road until World War II. When you went out Six Mile Road, after you crossed Wyoming, you were in the country. You could see nothing but pheasants and rabbits running across the field. 1941

When I started driving the bus, you only had very few blacks driving the bus at that time, and mostly all those were carryovers from World War I. Most of them worked for the old Detroit Urban Railway.

You drive up to a corner on the bus and open your doors, and they turn their back and say, "I don't ride with niggers." We used to laugh about it. We used to pull up in front of the Fisher Building on the Dexter bus going to Fullerton or Fenkell and open the doors and they'd turn their back on you. Me and a guy would holler out, "Well, you better come on and ride with me. The one behind me is blacker than me."

Whenever people would get on the bus, the fare was six cents, one penny for a transfer. People used to get on, and we had to make change. They used to take their money and hold it so they wouldn't touch your hand.

In 1943 I was working on Waterloo across Vernor Highway, just east of Waterloo cemetery. I was on vacation. I went out to the little confectionery at night to get my Free Press and get my ice cream. I saw this Randolph streetcar packed with people. That was a typical Sunday evening about 9 or 10 o'clock. Everybody leaving the park. It was hot. We didn't have a radio on, and TV hadn't come into being at that time. 1943.

Monday morning I got up and turned the radio on. The first thing you heard--rioting in Detroit. I thought, what are they talking about. Everybody had their radios on and people were calling people up. I was going out to the Northend, and I caught the Fort Street car. The guy told me, "You be careful when you get off downtown there on Monroe. Those fools down there have paper bags, and they got a brick in the paper bag. If you see somebody coming toward you with that bag in their hand swinging, you run away from them because they get right next to you and those white people haul off and hit you upside the head."

When the Fort Street car came off of Clinton onto Gratiot to go around by Sams and go down Monroe, when we turned on Randolph, here comes one little Black boy coming up Monroe by Sams. I bet you there were 200 whites behind him. I said, "Oh, my God."

The Eastern Market was a great place. You'd go over there and all the stuff that people sell you now, they'd give it to you. I know when Joe Muir had his place started, there on St. Aubin and

Gratiot. You couldn't go in but I enjoyed a lot of that pickerel and walleye and red snapper because we are a group of people that got by on what people thought was nothing but trash. They threw it out. I was living on Elmwood in 1937, between Macomb and Clinton. We used to go over to Joe Muir's restaurant. They would just filet the fish. They threw all the rest in the trash. All of that meat up there and all of the bone and all the tail We used to go over there with a dish pan on Friday. If you'd give those guys who was parking cars a quarter, they'd give all that to you. You'd get a dishpan full of fresh pickerel, fresh fish. You'd take it home and clean it up and wash it up and gut tht fish and you got a feast.

1937.

Senator Diggs broke the color bar at Eastern Market. You know the restaurants inside the market there? They wouldn't serve Blacks so he broke that up.

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I really couldn't see much difference in living in North Carolina as living in Detroit. You just had certain places down on Monroe, greasy spoons that would serve you. This was on Monroe and Randolph down to the Family Theater. You had three or four little restaurants that you could go into and get a hot dog or hamburger or whatever. But if you went up in Hudson's or to Frank's Tea Room on Farmer Street or any of those places, even Kresge's on Woodward and State, they didn't serve you. People used to walk in and buy a cup of coffee, and they had a little chair to sit in with a little desk, like a school desk. Cunningham Drug Store, Kinsel's Drug Stores, you couldn't eat in any of those places.

37