

Interview Jesse Pearson 5/3/03

MK: This is Marian Krzyzowski and I'm here with Monique Claiborne and John Halloren and we're here at the home of Mr. Jesse Pearson. Today is May 3, 2003 and here to talk with Mr. Pearson about his memories of growing up at the lower end of Chene Street. And I'll like to begin first by asking you some questions about your family. Your parents' name and where they were from? And when they were born if you have that information.

JP: Yes, I do. My parents, Jesse Pearson, that's my father, my mother was Donia Pearson, D-O-N-I-A and we came up here. We arrived here June 26, 1926. June 26, 1926 from Birmingham, Alabama. We moved, we came to 2176 Mullett, M-U-L-L-E-T-T and there was my brother, myself, my older sister Anasee, my brother Owen. It was two sisters and brothers and myself. And like I said we located 2176 Mullett and then we came up here I think because my father had got into some trouble or something in the south in Gaston [or Gadsden?], Alabama with the authorities or something and so he had to leave and so that's why he came up here.

MK: When were you born? What year were you born?

JP: I was born April 24, 1923

MK: And you were born in Birmingham?

JP: I was born in Gaston.

MK: Gaston, Alabama. And your sister and brother... what ages, what years were they born?

JP: My sister was born September 1, 1921 and my brother was born June 14, 1925 because I'm two years older than him.

MK: And your religious background--are you Christian, Baptist?

JP: Baptist, I was brought up Baptist.

MK: And how did they end up coming to Detroit? Why did they come to Detroit? Was there somebody they knew up here? Were there jobs?

JP: Right, right. At the time I think my father's sister, he had two sisters up here, had a ride up here from Alabama prior to, I don't know how long, but prior to him coming up here. That's why they came here.

MK: And the house they moved into on Mullett was that a one family house? Two family house?

JP: Two family house.

MK: And were you up or down?

JP: We were down

MK: And do you know who the people up stairs were at the time?

JP: No

MK: And how long did you live at that Mullett house?

JP: Maybe about 8 months and we moved across the street to a place called 2218 Mullett.

MK: And that's on Mullett between what and what?

JP: First it was on Mullett between St. Aubin and Dubois. And then when we moved to 2218 Mullett that was between Dubois and Chene.

MK: And that second house, the 2218, was that a 2 family house also?

JP: That was a four family.

MK: Four family?

HP: Right, and we lived on the 1st floor.

MK: And how long did you live at that house?

JP: Oh, we lived I that house about a year. My mother took me to school in 1923, '24, '26 took me to school in 1927 but I was two. I wasn't old enough to go there. I remember that vividly and she got lost coming back and I knew how to get back and brought her back to where we were living. I remember that very good. I even remember the fellow, Clarence Underwood, young, well he was young, he was my age. At that time when we first came to 2176 there was a barbeque place right on the corner, Young's Barbeque, and eventually they moved on Waterloo. But the original Young's Barbeque was there.

MK: On the corner of Dubois?

JP: Dubois and Mullett on the northwest corner.

MK: So you ended up going to school when you were five. You waited another year?

JP: Right.

MK: And what school did you go to?

JP: Duffield

MK: And what grade did you go through in Duffield?

JP: All the way to the seventh, I think it was. Duffield originally was a grammar school. I called it a grammar school. But when I was in the sixth grade when I graduated, when I would have left and gone to Miller they extended the life of the school, Duffield, extended it all the way through the 7th-8th you could go to because in 1936 when I would have gone to Miller my family moved from Detroit to North New Jersey. And so I stayed there a year and then we came back.

MK: So you came back in 1937?

JP: No. We left here in 1936 and came back here in 1937. You're right.

MK: And where did you live when you came back in 1937?

JP: Well we originally lived on the west side over on Northville. And we stayed there about--we were living with my grandmother, we stayed there for about 6 months. And then we eventually found a place, a house that we had lived in over on Fort street. We moved back in the house we had lived in before.

MK: What was the address on Fort Street?

JP: 2960

MK: Was it on the west side?

JP: On the east side.

MK: So Fort Street was lower than Mullet? It was down below?

JP: Right, right.

MK: So then you were probably closer to what? What street would have been the cross street there?

JP: Fort Street?

MK: Yeah.

JP: Let's see, going from east to west, it was downtown, coming from that way it would have been St. Aubin, it would have been Dubois, Chene, Joseph Campau, McDougall and then it was a cemetery. Going from south, traveling north it would have been Jefferson, that's the biggest one. Jefferson, Larned, Congress, Fort Street, Monroe, Macomb,

Sherman, Madison, I lived on Madison, Maple, Chestnut, I bought my first home on Chestnut, Antietam, Jay, Waterloo and then Vernor Highway. Vernor Highway and Chene that's where the Silver Cup Bakery was.

MK: Okay let's go back to the first memories you had when you lived on Mullett. What do you remember of that period before you ended up moving out?

JP: Well two things sticks in my memories from Mullett was my uncle and aunt came to see us, to visit us, and it was Halloween. And my uncle put me in a chair and showed me up like that and I remember being frightened, and so that was one thing. Then we moved to 2218 Mullett I remember a great big stove, it had those **placene** sort of type eyes. Well, you could look into the stove and see the coal, it burned coal. And we had one of those in the living room and then the other thing I remember about 2218, is that's where my mother she thought it was time take me to school and she got lost from there. Then we moved from 2218 Mullett to—oh, it escapes me, the address on Macomb. Macomb was one block south of Mullett and I started school there, and I used to go to school and I had what they call tetter. That was a disease in the head, you know, and they would put this red stuff on your head, and everybody would know that you had this disease. It's some sort of fungus, so I remember that. We moved around quite a bit, but two places I remember the most was living on Fort and--what was that? That should've been the later part of the twenties.

MK: Fort was when you all came back?

JP: No, we lived on Fort before I came back.

MK: Oh, you lived there before?

JP: Right. We left there and we moved to Fort from Macomb, and then from Macomb we moved to Fort. We were there for a short while, then we moved in about 1929, I know it was, yeah because the Depression and one of the things I remember about living on Macomb is during the Depression, we didn't have to go the soup line. They had soup, people families used to have to eat at the soup line. We never did have to and we took pride in that, that we were fortunate enough not to have to eat in the soup line.

MK: Where was the soup line at?

JP: That was the city feeding people.

MK: Do you know where in the neighborhood? Do you know where physically it was in the neighborhood?

JP: Uh huh. The one that I'm talking about was on--Elmwood, I can see the building now, it was on Elmwood and Monroe.

MK: Uh huh. Okay. Now, where did your father work?

JP: How long you been here?

MK: Where, in Detroit?

JP: In Detroit.

MK: Well, since 1951.

JP: Oh yeah, well, you'll remember then. It was the Detroit Stove Foundry.

MK: Sure.

JP: Yeah. He worked there.

MK: Did your mom work outside of the house or not?

JP: No.

MK: Okay. What do you remember about Duffield School?

JP: Oh, I remember finally going there, going to kindergarten. The kindergarten teacher was Mrs. Teuran.

MK: How is that spelled, do you remember?

JP: No I don't remember.

MK: Teuran?

JP: Teuran.

MK: Duran.

JP: You got my name through the Duffield Alumni?

MC: Was her Mariam, Mariel?

JP: There's the Duffield Alumni. In fact they're going to have an alumni day May the fifteenth. How did I get off on that?

MK: We're talking about Duffield Duran, Ms. Duran.

JP: Oh, Ms. Duran right. I can remember sitting on the floor and she was around us and I have another fond memory. I can remember Mrs.--no I can't think of her name right now--Ms. Dubois I remember her.

MK: Let me back up. Was Ms. Duran was she a white woman?

JP: Yeah. And Duffield at that time the whole school teachers were white except one. There was two coming up I experienced two black teachers that were over in Duffield. There was Ms. Bristol, you might have heard of her name. They had a funeral home and it was right there on Macomb and Joseph Campau, across the street from Duffield. But she was the home room teacher. I had her for home room teacher. Then there was a Mrs. Carter, a lady named Mrs. Carter, Marian Carter. She was the library teacher. So they were the only black teachers that I saw there. Then over at Miller they had Mr. L--Mr. L--Loving. In fact he was at U of M. He was the first black to teach at U of M. Alvin D. Loving. I had him and it was another guy named Mr. Benjamin or Mr. Cofer right. So there were three black men teachers over at Miller. So that's the only black teachers I knew at that time.

MK: Were most of the kids at Duffield black?

JP: No. I would say at least half of them were white because in June 1940 when I graduated I had my yearbook. I think about forty percent of the students who graduated were white and sixty percent were black.

MK: Okay. What about friends from that period of time, do you still keep in touch with them?

JP: At Duffield? Oh gosh. I don't keep in contact with them, most of them have died out, I've outlived them. Let me see, over at Duffield. Let's see there's Inez--I can't think of her last name--Mary--all of a sudden I can't think of their names. It'll come to me.

MK: Was there much socializing between the black and white kids in the school?

JP: No.

MK: So they were pretty separate?

JP: At that time, I bought my first home on Chestnut between Chene and Joseph Campau. I bought it and I was too young to even sign for it.

MK: How old were you?

JP: I must have been about--I bought it in '41.

MK: You were eighteen.

JP: Yeah. I bought it in '41. The dividing lines at that time was on Chestnut, my father Antietam, which was the next block over. Whites were out there. Blacks had moved up

to Chestnut and at the time that I bought my home there. I'm a kid there--I think I was the only black that had bought a home on Chestnut.

MK: What was the address on Chestnut? Do you remember?

JP: Oh yeah. 2688 Chestnut.

MK: How did you manage to buy a home at eighteen?

JP: Remember I said selling papers?

MK: Uh huh.

JP: I used to--I sold papers, I started selling papers when I was living on Fort Street and my mother she would let me sell papers then when we went to North New Jersey and we came back and I went into the business of selling papers. I had a big paper route and it was on Chene. Chene between Mullett and Clinton and I bought a paper route and I sold the redline edition and I sold the night edition. And when I came back I think I had something like four or five hundred customers all the while I was going to high school, I was selling papers. I eventually bought a car selling papers. I bought a '33 Ford. I paid a hundred dollars I think it was. I paid cash for it and in, oh gosh about 1938, this was after we came back, I surprised my mother and bought her a washing machine and I bought it from Sears Roebuck and my mother, I told the people I said when you go to deliver, my mother is going to say you're delivering to the wrong place. But, I'm paying for it cash here, you know, deliver the washer machine. And it was over a year before my mother would even use the machine. She didn't believe that the washing machine just doing it like that would clean the clothes. But going back to selling papers--

MK: Which papers did you sell?

JP: I sold Times. Detroit Times, and they had two editions. The night edition and what they called the redline edition. The night edition came out when I got out of school I delivered those papers and then about five thirty the redline edition came out and I delivered those papers.

MK: Where did you pick them up?

JP: Right there at Chene and Mullett. It was a pool room there. Lincoln, Lincoln Pool Room, the best I can remember.

MK: It was on the corner or not?

JP: It was right on the corner. It was on the southwest corner.

MK: And was it a black owned pool room? Or was it a white owned pool room?

JP: It was white. I don't know, I don't know the name of the people but I know Sam, the owner was named Sam.

MK: Okay. So you picked the papers up and then what did you do?

JP: Delivered them.

MK: Delivered them. So did you collect when you delivered or at the end of the week? How did you get paid?

JP: Okay. When you were delivering it was three cents a paper. We bought the papers for two cents and sell them for three cents. In fact somewhere, I don't even know, I have a bill that at the end of the week, you get a bill from Joel. That's the name of the guy that I was running the newspaper for. My bill would be a hundred and some dollars and I would have to collect the first hundred and some dollars that I collected, I had to pay for my paper, then everything after that was mine. And during that time, the WPA in '38, a lot of people got paid every two weeks and some people would get the paper for a month and they would lose one payment but, I wish I could have been an entrepreneur now like I used to be. But I was able to get my money and save my money and buy the different things. On Madison, I used to live on Madison between Chene and Joseph Campau, this was in '30, '29, '30, up to '36--they had a show there and they used to—theatre--

MK: Catherine?

JP: Catherine right. Catherine Theatre, and I used to pass out bills for that and passing bills around the neighborhood, you get to go in the show free. But going back to the newspaper, I bought a bike. I used the bike and after my route got so big, I hired a guy to deliver the papers on the bike and I would go and do the collecting, checking up with the car, the '33 Ford that I had. Oh, those were the good old days.

MK: Uh huh. Wow. On Madison, what was the address on Madison that you lived at?

JP: 2655

MK: Okay. So, did you have any problem while delivering or collecting, with crime or did you have anything like that?

JP: Never did. Never did.

MK: What about, let's talk about the street itself, those blocks that you remember of Chene Street. What did you remember of the businesses on there? Do you remember?

JP: Oh yeah. Yeah. At the end of the block that we stayed on. Chene and Madison, on that block it was a drug store. Dr. Sweet was the black dentist. Yeah he was black--

MK: Ossian Sweet.

JP: Ocean Sweet, that's right. And he had a brother named, I can't think of his name.

MK: Otis. Otis Sweet.

JP: Otis Sweet, okay. Well, he was the one, I think Ossian was the one that shot a white fellow over on the eastside there. So that was one corner. That was east, the northeast corner. Okay the southeast corner would have been the--oh, it was the--I guess part of it was the nightclub there. And then right next to it was Catherine's show. Because for years, it used to be Catherine, but then they changed the name to Madison. Then on the other corner going west it was a, it was a diner, a restaurant and then on the other corner was a hardware.

MK: Right. The restaurant listed here is Owl Restaurant. Does that seem right?

JP: Right, right right. That seems right.

MK: And then the Red Front and Chene Hardware? Does that sound right?

JP: Right.

MK: What do you remember about those two places? Were any of these black owned or were they white owned?

JP: They were all white owned.

MK: Did you ever go to any of these places?

JP: Let's see--no

MK: Do you remember what the Owl Restaurant looked like. If you were standing out in front of it what's it like?

JP: I can remember standing on Chene looking east, I mean looking west of the long counter there like an "L" and that's all I can remember.

MK: Did they have a sign out front like an "Owl" or what was it like outside?

JP: I don't remember.

MK: You don't remember?

JP: I don't know.

MK: What about the hardware store. Do you remember that at all?

JP: Oh yeah. I can remember that. I can remember how it was made on the inside. Things were hanging up when you walked in. It was a Jewish fellow that was the owner if I'm not mistaken. He was the owner of this.

MK: Okay. And what did it look like on the inside then?

JP: I guess to me it looked like the typical hardware store, all junky with a whole lot of stuff in it.

MK: How about from the outside? Where there windows out front?

JP: Yea, there were windows in the front and I think and I'm not positive, there was an awning. They use to pull the awning down and it had "Hardware" on it.

MK: Any other stores you remember in that?

JP: In that same--

MK: You know what, let me stop. The Catherine Theatre, can you tell me? Can you describe the Catherine Theatre? What it looked like.

JP: Yeah. The Catherine Theatre was next door to the Owl Restaurant. No, not the Owl Restaurant, the Owl Night Club. The Catherine Theatre I used to pass bills for that and work in there on Saturdays, help clean it up so you could get in free. And a fellow name Pee Wee he was in charge of and I got to be a regular. And Saturday morning all of us would stand outside and wait for Pee Wee to open up and he would pick the guys that he would want to pass the bills and he would pick the guys that he wanted to clean up. And I got to be one of, a favorite of Pee Wee and when he opened the door, he'd tell me and some more fellows to come on in.

MK: Was he a white guy or a black guy?

JP: No he was a black. He was black. It was white owned but he was black, Pee Wee. And it was something else I can remember about passing those bills--oh I know, I know, I know. On Saturday night they use to run a double feature, something like a midnight show. And they would get through showing what they were going to show for Saturday and they would show the Sunday and so you would get to see two for one. Anyway, during that time, there was a fellow named Ben Turpin. And he was a black policeman over on the east side. Big burly, black guy and when he would come into the show, all the kids that was doing a lot of talking [lowers voice] "Ben Turpin's here, Ben Turpin's here," and when you heard all the noise go down, you know Ben Turpin was there and he took pride, he used to wear two guns, he used to take pride in being a bastard. B-a-s-t-a-r-d, I mean in the full sense of the word. I never will forget, I was selling papers on Mullett, I was right there on Mullett and Chene and it was a girl that--I think it was maybe his niece or something and I knew her from school and she was in his car and she said hi to me and I was standing up at the car talking to her. I was on my bike and I was

talking to the girl and he came up and he said something like, words to the effect, “What in the hell are you doing here talking to this girl? and if I catch you talking to her again I’m gone put my foot up your butt.” Or something like that. And I never did like Ben Turpin. I’ll remember that if I get to be ninety years old or a hundred years old, I’ll remember that.

MK: Well you’re now the only one who remembers him I’ve heard other people tell me about him.

JP: Ben Turpin?

MK: Bad guy. Yeah. Bad guy. Especially against black people.

JP: Right. Well, you getting it from the horse’s mouth.

MK: Where did he live? Do you know where he lived?

JP: He lived on Antietam. I delivered paper to his house. He had a very, his wife was very very fair, she could almost could pass for white. Yeah. I remember that.

MK: Any other characters you remember besides Ben Turpin?

JP: No.

MK: Were there many black policemen?

JP: There was one other black policeman during that time that I knew of. What was his name? He lived on Chestnut. I can’t think of his name. At that time I think there probably about three or four blacks on the entire force. And I think there was one black fellow that was on the DSR.

MK: Uh huh. Going back to the stores now. You got the Catherine Theatre. Is there anything else you remember in those blocks?

JP: Let me see. In that same block, there was a grocery store and my aunt and uncle lived upstairs over it.

MK: It was on the same side of the street as the Catherine or the other side?

JP: Same side.

MK: Same side as Catherine.

JP: It was on **Hollet**.

MK: Okay. You know that same street, on that same block, had the Savoy Theatre too.

JP: Right. The Savoy Theatre. It was between Madison and Mullett. The Savoy Theatre. It was on the other side, right.

MK: Did you ever go to Savoy?

JP: Once in a while.

MK: What was the difference between the Catherine and Savoy? Was there anything different between the two?

JP: No. The only thing, the Catherine had more features and the Savoy didn't have as many change of pictures and things. I think if memory serves me right, Catherine used to have pictures Sunday and Monday. Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, they would change on Friday and Saturday or something like that. Savoy didn't change as often.

MK: Did those movie theatres have dish nights?

JP: Who?

MK: When if you bought a ticket, you would get a dish.

JP: I had forgotten that. I had forgotten that. They sure did.

MK: So did you or your folks ever--

JP: I'd get some, my mother didn't go to shows. She didn't and my dad didn't go either.

MK: Were they sanctified?

JP: No. They weren't sanctified. They just didn't go to shows.

MK: Let me ask you about your parents again. When did they pass away?

JP: My dad died in 1938. Yeah, 1938, after we came back from north New Jersey. He went to north New Jersey in 1936 and he was a manager of a medicine company. manager of a medicine company. They sold medicine door to door. And he got sick over in north New Jersey and we hadn't been over there long enough to qualify for welfare, but they shipped us back to where we came from. And so, he came back and subsequently died here. So my mother, with her heart and such, she just died recently. Something like ten years ago. She was ninety six.

MK: Wow. And when you then went to high school, where did you go to high school?

JP: Miller.

MK: Miller. And you graduated in what year from Miller?

JP: June '40.

MK: Okay. And after high school what did you do?

JP: After high school, what did I do?

MK: You bought the house on Chestnut.

JP: Right.

MK: What was the address again?

JP: 2688. And I went to work, let me get my thoughts straight now. I was living on Fort Street when I graduated from high school and I got a job. Where did I get my first job? Oh I got my first job at Cunningham Drug Store as a porter.

MK: Which Cunningham?

JP: It wasn't Cunningham. But it was Shapiro Drug Store. That was the high class stores for Cunningham. I started at the National Bank Building down on Woodward and... Downtown. Woodward and Fort Street, I think it was.

MK: Uh huh.

JP: And then I moved to National Bank Building for Shapiro Drug to the Penobscot Building. It was just the opposite. I started first at the Penobscot Building and I moved there. I got to know secretaries in the different law offices. So I started taking them out for coffee and different stuff like that and I told them that I was looking for a job. This was in '41 when I was looking for a job getting into the plants and things. So I talked to three different ladies and they were secretaries for some of the companies that represented, Murray Body Company, Bourne Aluminum Brass Corporation and there was two more. Anyway, the first letter I took to Bourne Aluminum and at that time, people were lined all up, you know waiting to get hired and the guy came out and said, "Anybody got a letter?" And I was way at the back of the line, So he asked me to come on up, so I came on up and he looked at the letter, and said, "When can you start?" I told him I can start, you know, whenever they wanted to. And so he said, come back, I think in a couple of days passed and I had to come and take a physical. Then I got hired and started to work at Bohn Aluminum Brass Company. I worked there--

MK: Is that over on St. Aubin? Over by the Boulevard?

JP: That was Plant 2. Plant 1 and Plant 2. The one I worked at was 22nd and East Street, off of Michigan Avenue.

MK: On the west side.

JP: Right. So I started to work there and I worked there until 1943, maybe, then I got laid off. I was metal pourer. I got on my arm here right now, from metal pouring, out of one of them ladles. That was a horrible job. Oh, when I think about it. Anyway, I got laid off and I got a job at Frederick Stearns and Frederick Stearns was on Jefferson, across the street from U.S. Rubber. Frederick was a pharmaceutical place and I worked there until I went to the war. Well in the mean time when I was at Cunningham, when I was at the National Bank Building, I got married. I was only eighteen years old--

MK: What's your wife's name?

JP: Rosemary.

MK: And her maiden name?

JP: Rosemary Carson.

MK: And where were you guys married?

JP: In Toledo. Went and got married in Toledo. Didn't have to get married, you know, she wasn't pregnant or anything. That was in '41, so I graduated in June '40. I got married the next February, and the next year I bought the house. Or was it--yeah, right in there, '41 and '42.

MK: So after the Bohn Aluminum job, where did you go?

JP: I went to Frederick Stearn.

MK: How long were you at Stearn?

JP: I stayed there until August 1944. That's when I went to the Army.

MK: And you were in the service for how long?

JP: Two years. I put nineteen months over in Iwo Jima. I was in a Quartermaster Laundry Company. And here let me state it right now, I stated it then. I hated the day that I stepped up and got into the Army until the day--I hated it, I hated the Army. I hated it with a passion. In fact, when they first called me, I was married at the time. When they called me to come in, I went down on McDougall and Congress and I took my physical examination and I went off into, you go through, just before the end you go through a psychiatrist examination. Whoever examined me said well, I see something, he said something about putting me in the Army. He said, "How do you think you'll like it

being in the Army?" I said, "I know I wouldn't like it." He said, "Why?" and I said, I can remember it word for word, but I'm eighty years old and I remember. I said because I don't want to go and fight for a country where the people that I'm fighting are accorded better treatment than me. And what I had read recently, it was some Italian prisoners of war down somewhere in Alabama. And the troop train had stopped and the black soldiers that were guarding the troop train, they couldn't eat at this little restaurant stop, but the prisoners of war, the Italians, they served them in the front and the soldiers, they had to be served in the back. And it was different things like that I reading, and that just grind me. So, they classified me as 4F and I stayed that way for about two weeks and I got another telegram. I kept that telegram for years. It said report to induction quarter and report to Sergeant McGuire. I went down that morning to Sergeant McGuire and they sat me in front of a psychiatrist or something, whatever it was, anyway, it looked like an army, a navy guy or something with a lot of braid on, and I got frightened. I got afraid to show my anti-American feelings. So he said, "son, I see where you don't want to serve in the Army. Well, we're going to put you in and see how you like it." And do you know what those S.O.B.'s did? They wouldn't even let me go back home. They put me in the Army. I went downstairs and they swore me in right then and there. I never will forget it, you know, step forward, you are now in the Army. I had to call my wife up and tell her to bring me some shaving stuff in order for me to have something. And they left and they shipped my butt off to the Fort Frances E. Warren, Wyoming. No, I'm sorry, they shipped me to Fort Sheridan, Illinois. And, I didn't see my wife until, oh, I saw her at Christmas time. This was in August. I saw her at Christmas time. My son was born in September and I couldn't even come home to see him. I hated the chicken shit, excuse me baby, of the Army. I hated, and I never will forget when I was ready to come home and they were trying to, at the separation center, trying to talk guys into re-upping. And the guy started on it, I said, "I don't want to hear any of it," because I was getting ready to get out the Army. And so, it's no way in the world they could have talked me into re-upping. And see everything I remember of the Army when I was in, was segregated. We had a, the outfit that I went over in, was a 3098 Quartermaster Laundry Company, and I was the clerk. I had always had some sort of ability to do clerical work. I enjoyed that kind of work. I think two or three hundred and sixty five men and four, we had four platoons, we had five officers, there was a second lieutenant and the first lieutenant handled each one of the platoons and they were white, and the captain was white. But everybody else was black. And I never saw a black officer all while I was there. I did my basic at Fort Frances E. Warren, Wyoming and I left there and went up to Fort Lewis, Washington and shipped off there to Iwo Jima, well I went to Hawaii and Saipan and eventually went to Iwo Jima. And stayed nineteen months on that [REDACTED]. But like I said, every moment I, right to this day, I don't like the chicken shit of the Army. Privates kiss butts of corporals, corporals kiss butt, anybody that's ranked higher than you, you gonna kiss butt. But like it says, if a person is going to be in the Army, have some rank. Get as much rank as you possibly can. Now if I'd have gone in there after I went to college, and graduated from college, I would have gone in as, I guess as an officer. I don't know.

MK: So when you got out of the Army, what did you do?

JP: What did I do? Okay, lived on Chestnut.

MK: You had at least one son by then, right?

JP: Right.

MK: Now his name was?

JP: Milborn. Yeah, he was the only one, and of all these years I haven't had anymore children.

MK: You had one son?

JP: One son. My wife and I, we didn't get along too well and seeing as that we didn't get along anyway, I left home and we divorced and I left home in '46. No, I came back from the Army in '46. I feel that my marriage was a casualty of the war. My wife was young and I was young. Didn't have too good sense and all that.

MK: So, then you came back, did you move back to Chestnut or did you live somewhere else after that? You moved out?

JP: I moved out.

MK: Where did you move to?

JP: Where did I move to? I got a room somewhere.

MK: In the same neighborhood?

JP: No. It was on--where did I move to? Yeah, I moved up there to an apartment up on John R.

MK: And where did you go, did you go to work someplace or did you go to school, back to school?

JP: No, I went to work. I went back to Frederick Stearn and Frederick Stearn closed down. Then I went Parke Davis and I put nineteen years at Parke Davis. That was a racist place, Parke Davis. I left Parke Davis, and while I was at Parke Davis, I went to, I started at school.

MK: Where at?

JP: Wayne State. And I eventually graduated from there.

MK: What year did you get your degree?

MK: In what year?

JP: '68

MK: Congratulations.

JP: Huh?

MK: Congratulations.

JP: Yeah. I put in eight long years getting that degree going to school part time. I never did take over two classes and like I said, it took me eight years steady going but I got it.

MK: So you were at Parke Davis for nineteen years?

JP: Uh huh.

MK: And what did you do at Parke Davis, what kind of work did you do?

JP: It was chemical work, mixing the chemicals together to make medicine.

MK: And then after you left Parke Davis, where did you go?

JP: After I left Parke Davis, I went to Bon Secours Hospital. I quit Parke Davis and went to Bon Secours Hospital and hired as a, at that time I was hired as an accountant. And I finished school while I was at Bon Secours Hospital and I was promoted to Assistant Controller then I eventually was promoted to Controller. I left Parke Davis, I left Von Secours for about a year and went over to Highland Park General as Chief Financial Officer there. And things weren't right there and I left and went back to Bon Secours. In fact my boss, we, April 24th was my birthday and he came out here and picked me up and we went to, he took my out for dinner to celebrate my 80th birthday. We were friends all the while we were working with each other.

MK: Was this a white guy?

JP: Yeah, white guy. Yeah. **Larry Doherty.**

MK: Wow, and then your son, your son live in the area?

JP: No. He used to. He lives in Florida now. I can't think of the name of the city. He went to work for United Parcel Post and he was a driver and he eventually got on salary. And they have a program that awards stock to management and he got stock every year plus he was slum landlord, he was a hustler. That's what I call him a slum landlord. And he's a hustler. He invested the money, invested the money in UPS stock and they went private. And then when they went private his stock blossomed up until, when he cashed out his

total worth was over a million dollars. He retired, put 30 years in. His wife retired and they're the reason I'm here. He bought a home over on Walnut Lake, big, beautiful home. And he sold that, the northwest corner, and built a home on a golf course down in Florida there. And he's doing well. I'm proud of him.

MK: Wow

JP And his son, my grandson is a CPA, that's what I wanted, worse than anything, anybody ever wanted but at that time when I went to school, blacks weren't. Because when I was Wayne State there was only one more black in the whole accounting curriculum. And see I didn't go to school until I was 38 years old so I was too old to get into the program. It was a private CPA firm and my grandson became certified, he has his own practice, on Eight Mile, he has his office there.

MK: What's his name?

JP: His name is Milburn.

MK: Also Milburn.

JP: Milburn, the Second. In addition, he's a minister. He's a minister, he has rental property, he does taxes for people in the airline industry, he has a big practice with them. He's a hustler.

MK: Sounds like quite a success story.

JP: Yeah, I'm proud of both of them. One of the things I'm proud of, my grandson came out to Bon Secours with his mother one time and after he left, Milburn left, we call him "Toos," he told his mother that's what he wants to be when he gets grown, he wants to be an accountant like his grand-daddy. So I motivated him to become an accountant.

MK: Let's go back to Miller. What do you remember about Miller High School? Monique connected us to a group of Miller Alums over on the west side. They all lived down in that area, you know, down on the east side. A lot of people have a lot of loyalty for Miller High School. What was your experience at Miller?

JP: Well, at that time, I guess Miller was the preeminent high school for blacks, and it was probably ninety-five percent--no no it wasn't because in June '40, it was forty percent white graduated at that time because I have the yearbook. If I had've known, I would have had it down here.

MK: Let me ask you something about the yearbook. I'm photographing yearbooks, so I wonder if I can arrange another time to come by and to photograph your yearbook.

JP: Oh okay. I'll see if, I'm pretty sure I can find it.

MK: Okay great.

JP: Okay. June '40.

MK: Yeah, I'll photograph the whole yearbook. I'll photograph everything.

JP: Oh okay, okay. I think I know where it is.

MK: Okay. Great.

JP: I guess back in those days, Miller was the preeminent high school for blacks. The first black teacher I had was Dr. Loving and they formed a Miller Alumni Club back in the oh, I don't know. I know it was a couple of people in a couple classes before me. I used to go to all the affairs that the Miller Alumni had and right now, I'm not a regular. I'd been going to the affairs every year until I had the stroke. They're active. It's a fellow named, oh I can't think of his name--

MK: The guy we talked to was Charlie Primas.

JP: Charlie Primas. Right.

MK: Yeah, we interviewed Charlie.

JP: Oh you did. Big fellow.

MK: Yeah, yeah, yeah. He used to play football right?

JP: Right. Charlie Primas.

MK: For Toronto or somebody right?

JP: Yeah, he's done a good job of keeping the group together and running things. Duffield's trying to do something like that, but the only thing about that, well no because my class is dying out I was like now all the classes are dying out but my class was June '36. That's the year I left Miller and not too many later classes left because in order to have left Duffield before then, you would have to be ninety years old.

MK: So, did you enjoy Miller? Was it a good experience?

JP: It was a wonderful experience. The only thing about it was I couldn't participate in all the things I wanted to because after the school day, I had to go sell papers. I played basketball I made reserve, I made varsity, and in fact I was co-captain of the varsity. In this yearbook, it shows me about a hundred pounds lighter in my uniform. Yeah, I enjoyed Miller.

MK: What did you do, I mean obviously you worked hard after school, but what did you do for fun?

End of Side One

MK: So, I wanted to ask you, you worked, you did the route, you had the papers, uwhat did you do for fun during those years?

JP: You mean as a kid or as an adult?

MK: Yeah, as an adolescent you know in high school, did you go out to dances, what kind of stuff did you do that was not work related and not school related?

JP: Okay. I was talking about this yesterday. Yeah, yesterday. There was a ballroom on Woodward named Greystone Ballroom and all the big black bands used to go there and we kids used to go there but at that time, the only time blacks could go in the ballroom was on Monday night. We would go there and see Duke Ellington, Andy Kirk, Count Basie, etc. The next morning, you could easily tell the kids that are going because the dance that night cause if you looked and saw somebody looking sleepy you knew they had been to the ballroom because the dance let out at one o'clock I think and the time you got home was around you know it was two o'clock or something. So, then we used to go to dances up and down Woodward. There was the Majestic Ballroom, there was another, a couple, Frank and Sullivan, we used to have dances over there.

MK: When you went to the Greystone on Mondays was that typically a date night or was that also a place for you to meet girls? You came with a date or was there also places where you can meet girls at the dance?

JP: No. When you went to the Greystone if you wanted a date, most guys took their girlfriends. No it wasn't that kind of a place.

MK: Were there any places like that where you could meet girls for dances? Do you remember?

JP: I don't remember any particular place. The different ballrooms that we went to, if you didn't take a girl, you didn't have anybody to dance with and other guys they looked, you know with a funny eye if you dancing with their girlfriend. We didn't have a, just like teenagers right here up on the corner, at Champs Restaurant and different other places there. My wife used to call it a meet hook. Something that you go there late at night and you see nothing but young kids, nothing but teenagers, meeting people. We didn't have any places like that. Blacks didn't, no.

MK: So there were no candy stores or soda places or kind of hangouts for the kids in the neighborhood where they would meet each other there?

JP: CHURCH. Church, Church. There must have been some place where we met. Church. I was living on Madison and there was a place on Clinton. Bethlehem Temple Sanctified Church. They had services at night and that was about the only church in that neighborhood where they had services at night. The guys, we used to go over there to you know, to meet the girls there. It was another church we used to go to, St. James A.M.E. Church on Jay and Chene. They used to have night services and we used to go over there.

MK: So they'd have something after the service?

JP: No. During services, the girls and boys were supposed to be in service and we wouldn't be in services, we were sparking, you know. It's a funny thing. Boys and girls will find a way to get together. Yeah, church. But I can't think of any businesses cause there weren't that many businesses.

MK: Speaking of businesses again, do you remember any black owned businesses in that neighborhood? Even like barbershops or so on, was there any kind of commercial black business?

JP: Yeah. Two or three of them. Cleaners.

MK: Which cleaners?

JP: Oh, I can't think of the name.

MK: Where was it?

JP: Let me see. Over on Joseph Campau. There was a drugstore, Benson B-E-N-S-O-N. Benson's Drugstore. It was over on Maple on Joseph Campau.

MK: Which corner?

JP: It was on the west, southwest corner. Then there was several cleaners, the cleaners I can't think of the name of that guy, it was on Madison and Joseph Campau. That was on the southwest corner. Let's see there must have been some more.

MK: What about funeral homes? Black owned funeral homes.

JP: Well, there was Bristol Funeral Home over on Joseph Campau and Macomb. There was Diggs Funeral Home, Charles Diggs. In fact, him and I were in school together. We graduated together and we became good friends. His father's place was on St. Aubin and Maple. That's the Diggs Funeral Home. And the other funeral home was down in the Black Bottom.

MK: Did people call it Black Bottom? Did you call it Black Bottom at that time?

JP: Uh huh. Uh huh. And the people that lived down there, we differentiated. I could tell whether you lived down in Black Bottom. Years later, we in Black Bottom, we considered Black Bottom to start from the east, we used to consider as Dequindre. The train tracks, in other words between Orleans and St. Aubin. That's where the Grand Trunk. Well, that was the divide line for people that lived in Black Bottom. That was Black Bottom, then it would go down to Jefferson and Vernor Highway, was the northern most part of it, Black Bottom, and then the western part was the cemetery. Elmwood Cemetary. That was true Black Bottom. Anybody that didn't live down there, someplace else, you called anything on the east side Black Bottom. But we Back Bottomers, we didn't.

MK: So it was the railroad tracks to the cemetery and Jefferson to Vernor?

JP: Right. To a person that lived in Black Bottom, that was Black Bottom.

MK: What about any kind of night life for adults, you know. Clubs, any kind of music clubs that stand out in your mind, were there anything that you remember?

JP: Okay during the war, no. When I was a kid, you know part of the time when I was a kid they had the Prohibition was in. But after that, during the war when I became a youngster, the nightlife was what we used to call Uptown. Adams, Brush, Frame's Show Bar, Frolick's Show Bar, Twenty Grand. That's where all the people down in Black Bottom, that's where we would go to nightclubs.

MK: What about numbers. Did people run numbers, and how did that work down in the Black Bottom?

JP: Oh yeah. Well, there were numbers. They were two or three different kinds of numbers, well at least three different kind of numbers because my dad used to write numbers, that was what they call a single house numbers and it was a number house called Royal Blue. I think it was nine or ten numbers in a row and you'd have numbers from one to seventy-eight or something and you'd play a number. You'd put in a nickel and you would get five dollars or something. Then there was a double house. Let me remember, Georgia--anyway, Tijuana Interstate, I can't remember the names, anyway 1-2-3 plays for clear water. 3-6-9 plays for filth. In other words, if you dreamed of filth, it plays for 3-6-9. If you dreamed of something pertaining to clear water, it's 1-2-3. They had dream books back in those days and then there was the Italian Lottery that came out on Saturday and it paid more money than any of them.

MK: Someone told me about the mutuals, but one of the papers that would run--

JP: The Free Press.

MK: Was it the Free Press?

JP: Free Press. On the front page of the Free Press you could look and see what they did in races or somewhere. Anyway, those three numbers would be the number. The reason I know that is because I was carrying the paper. "Paper boy, what was the number?" They would ask me or they would want to see. "Let me take a look at your paper." I would say 3-6-9. You know or whatever I knew what the number was. It was in the Free Press.

MK: Did you ever sell numbers?

JP: No. None.

MK: I talked to a white guy who sold newspapers about the same time you did up on Milwaukee and Chene and he sold numbers. While he was selling the paper, he was also selling you know. What about, were there any of the stores that were particularly known as this is the place. I suppose all of the stores to some extent would have been potential places to sell numbers.

JP: I would think so. I can't remember any particular store. I can remember different people used to write numbers.

MK: What about organized crime? What about the bad kind of stuff, you know robberies and bank robberies and stuff like that. Do you remember that?

JP: I don't remember any of that.

MK: Did you feel safe in that neighborhood?

JP: Oh gosh, yeah. I don't think I ever had a key to my house until I bought a house as a kid. The door was never locked.

MK: Did you go to church beyond just the meeting girls?

JP: Well, I went to church because my parents made me. I had to go. I never went voluntarily. But see as a youngster I got accustomed to going to church and my mother she went to the same church until almost the day she died.

MK: What church was that?

JP: It was New Mount Zion. It was up on Leland and between Russell and Riopelle. New Mount Zion Baptist Church. And then when I was going to school I used to go to Macedonia Baptist church. It was a Missionary Baptist Church because there were more girls there. The church my mother and father went to wasn't in the immediate neighborhood but they used to have a lot of girls over there and I used to go over there. But I never did go to church too much as a young boy because on Sunday morning I'm selling papers.

MK: Do you guys have any questions?

BP: '43 Riots.

MK: Yeah, what about the 1943 Riots, do you remember those?

JP: Oh yeah.

MK: Can you tell us what you remember about the '43 riots.

JP: We heard in the black neighborhood that some white guy had threw a baby over off the bridge and everybody got riled up about that. That's what I heard and I went to work the next morning and I don't know if I was on Michigan Avenue or not. Anyway, I was in line behind some cars and if I had've kept on, I would have jammed up on a lot of white guys right on the west of Woodward, and they were stoning cars. And I ducked out from there and went a different kind of route and came back home so I didn't get involved in that. Nobody stoned my car. And I can remember the next day when the troops came into the neighborhood.

MK: Where did they go? Where were the troops stationed?

JP: The troops were stationed, I don't know where they were stationed but I can remember them riding in riot cars, you know troop carriers on Madison, Joseph Campau, Chene, all up in that area, that's where they were patrolling.

MK: Was there much violence in your neighborhood there? Do you remember anything happening in that area?

JP: Well see I think some black guys they caught white cars, I guess they were doing the same thing, they caught white cars and if you got caught in it, they were stoning you then, but I didn't see any particular. I know a lot of blacks, young boys, we were walking up and down the street and let's see, did I see any, there was a drugstore on Sherman and Joseph Campau, Finnegan's Drugstore, they broke into that store and was stealing whiskey, the young guys. That's about all. I stayed in. That's about all I can remember of that, in 1943.

MK: When you were working for Parke Davis, where were you living at that time?

JP: That's a good question, where was I living? I worked there for nineteen years, I was working, I lived, okay, I lived, I got remarried and I was living--

MK: And your wife's name was--

JP: Bernice.

MK: Bernice?

JP: Bernice. What was Bernice's maiden name? I can't even remember, it's been such a long time ago. I bought a brand new home, I can't think of the year. It was way out on Wyoming and Eight Mile.

MK: The west side.

JP: West side. Wyoming and Eight Mile. I was working at Parke Davis at that time.

MK: That's a long drive. Parke Davis down on the river?

JP: Let me see. Wait a minute. Let me get my lies straight [laughs]. My memory one was just coming to me without an effort, when you ask that kind of question where I was living most of the time I was working at Parke Davis. **Roger Dushern** I met him I was married to Bernice. Where was I living then? I'm working to, that was a long time.

MK: Uh huh.

JP: It certainly was. Right right. I used to leave my car at home for my wife to use and I used to catch the Eight Mile bus up on Eight Mile and ride all the way down to just past the Boulevard on Jefferson and then catch the bus from there to Joseph Campau and walk down to the river. Yeah. Yeah.

MK: Long way.

JP: Huh?

MK: Long way.

JP: Right. Right.

MK: Back in the Black Bottom, did you go to a dentist or a doctor. Do you remember going to any?

JP: Right. There was a black doctor and I can't think of...it was one over on um Clinton. Dr. Thompson. I went to Dr. Sweet one time, but most of the doctors at that time would come to your house.

MK: What about barber? Where did you go to the barber shop?

JP: My dad cut my hair most of the time. Because he used to give me clean heads, you know.

MK: Uh huh. Any questions Monique?

MC: There was a temple for the Nation of Islam on like Chestnut on Chene, do you recall that?

JP: I certainly do sweetheart. I went there a couple of times, it was a temple of Islam. I was a kid, well let me see. It was upstairs I remember Chene and Chestnut, I bought my first house right there on Chestnut. But I went there once or twice and you weren't supposed to go to those places, the policemen would stand around taking the names of the people who was going there.

MK: How come?

JP: Subversive or something. That's the only thing I know.

MK: So did you ever see Elijah Muhammad. Was he there?

JP: No. I don't remember him. I think he came way later.

MC: Was it on Chene or was it on Chestnut?

JP: It was on Chene between Chestnut and Maple I think. Or between, it was on Chene between either Chestnut and Maple or Chestnut and Antietam.

MC: It was someone's house?

JP: Huh?

MC: What it a house or a storefront?

JP: No, it was a building. It was a building and it was upstairs on the second floor. I think I went there once or twice and I don't remember what they were talking about or anything like that. But I hadn't thought of that in I can't tell when.

MK: Why did you go there?

JP: I guess because you weren't supposed to go there, being adventuresome. That's why. It was, I think it was supposed to be anti-American or something and I was inquisitive.

MK: But you didn't stay.

JP: Oh no. I just went there for a meeting, you know and years later, remember I was a youngster at that time. I think I was still living on Chestnut and I probably was 18, 19 or 20, something like that. I was adventuresome when I was a youngster. I have nothing but fond memories down in Black Bottom. One of the things you didn't hear any killing people or you didn't hear guys fighting, you know with a knife and things like that and in fact, I was hearing just yesterday, my stepson's wife, her brother shot her brother. One

brother shot another brother yesterday. In fact my wife's going up with them too. Going up today. This is in Grand Rapids, though. But you didn't hear people shooting people or anything like that. Guys getting into fights and things, they would cut each other but it wasn't anything like you know stealing from each other and all that kind of stuff. We didn't have any of that.

MK: What about the black white relations in the Black Bottom, the stores or even--

JP: Well, for most part, there weren't any kind of social interaction, never has been. Naturally, the stores, all the stores were owned by whites, most of them were Jewish people. All up and down Hastings all the stores were owned by Jewish people and all the other stores down in here, different nationalities, in the city of Detroit, ever since I was a kid which is back in the twenties, whites have been fleeing from blacks in their neighborhood and we have traditionally followed the Jewish people. I can remember a time up and down, we used to call it Uptown., Palmer, Ferry, all in that neighborhood, all of that was Jewish people and they would move. They moved up to Philadelphia, up Dexter. That was the main thoroughfare there. 'cause I moved on Philadelphia between Dexter and Holmur. But in the city of Detroit, I don't know about any other cities, Jewish people would sell to blacks and blacks would move in. Right now, West Bloomfield, the tradition has been of a Jewish enclave and blacks are moving in West Bloomfield. One of the things, nowadays, blacks, most blacks can move where they want because, right now if I wanted to move to one of the nearest suburbs I don't think I would have any problem. But I have a buddy, Jewish fellow, he's a retired attorney. He's my walking buddy. He lives right around the corner and we often talk. We've been walking together for about four or five years and you walk about a mile and a quarter and you can cover many a subjects and he does most of the talking. I do the listening but things, back in those days, like I said, there wasn't too much interaction. It just wasn't. And I don't know what year it was when they came up with the restrictive covenant where you couldn't, were restricted to selling your house to a person. Things have been much better since.

MK: Do you remember Joe Louis or his family at all because the mom lived off of Mullett and McDougall or something like that?

JP: No. He bought his mother a house on Chestnut and McDougall, which was two blocks down from where I was. I don't remember, not that I remember Joe Louis from a personal standpoint, but I remember his Brown Bombers. They had a softball team, the Brown Bombers, I remember that. I remember his sister, Ms. Davis. I remember a couple of the relatives, but I don't remember, see Joe Louis was older than I was you know, when you're a youngster, four or five years makes a big difference.

MK: Well those are my questions. I really appreciate. It was a lot of fun. Do you guys have anything other things you wanted to ask?

BP: No. Not particularly.

MK: Okay. Well thank you very much Mr. Pearson.

JP: Okay.