

Charlie Primas Interview 3/20/2004

MK: This is Marian Krzyzowski and I'm here with Monique Claiborne and Ashley Bell at the City Residence on March the 20th of 2004 and we're here to speak with Charles Primas. Do you go by Charles or Charlie?

CP: Charlie

MK: Charlie Primas about his memories of the neighborhood commonly known as the Black Bottom also Miller High School memories. Id like to begin first by asking some questions about your folks and were they were from, you dad you mom, their names, where they were born and how the family ended up in this neighborhood?

CP: Well let me preface this by saying that I am a member of Black Bottom. We came to Detroit in March the 20th, quite ironic though in 1939 and we came from a little town in Mississippi. They call it Shuqualak here in the Midwest but we called it Sugarlock S-H-U-Q-U-A-L-A-K and the reason we got here is because my father was a farmer. He worked at this particular time, he worked at what they called a cotton gin, and one night as they were bailing cotton allegedly a bail of cotton fell on him and broke his back and he died. And so my mother, there were 4 of us, my older sister is deceased now, but there was 4 of us, two little sisters they don't remember Mississippi and my older sister Louise which is deceased now and my mother. The 4 of us came to Detroit and we moved at a little place on Hunt Street, our house is closed down now, 3374 Hunt St, which we called Black Bottom. And there we went to Elementary School, it was the Smith School then but now I think its Ralph Bunche. And then we went to Harris Elementary School. Then we left there and we went to Miller, at that time naw I went to Barber excuse me I went to Barber Middle School before Miller. Then we went to Miller School and that's where it all started at Miller High School, it was a high school then but now it's a middle school.

MK: And your dad and mom's names?

CP: My fathers name was Charlie, also. My mother's name was Harriet, she's deceased now, H-A-R-R-I-E-T, Harriet.

MK: And her maiden name?

CP: Salina

MK: S-E?

CP: S-A-L-I-N-A Perry, Harriet Salina Perry.

MK: And they were both born--

CP: They were both born in Mississippi.

MK: Shuqualak?

CP: Shuqualak, yes.

MK: And order of your siblings, you had one older sister?

CP: Older sister Louise, she's deceased now.

MK: And when was she born? Do you remember?

CP: Louise was born in March the, now Louise was born in August of 1930, 1930.

MK: And when were you born?

CP: I was born in '32 and I had two younger sisters Mary-Helen was born in I think '33 or '34 and Minnie my baby sister was born in '35

MK: And her name was?

CP: Uh--

MK: The youngest one?

CP: Minnie. It was Louise, Charlie

MK: Then Mary-Ellen

CP: Mary-Helen then Minnie

MK: And when you moved up here did your mom go to work some place?

CP: My mother, when we first moved here my mother went to work in the cleaners. I'm trying to think of the cleaners name but you know that was 60 years ago 61. But I know she was a maid, a custodian at the Adams Theatre downtown in this city. Now let me kind of deviate for a moment in this city there was certain places reserved for blacks, I don't care but they were smooth. They knew how to do it. In other words when a black person walked in downtown they would say, oh let me sit you up stairs. But we thought they were so courteous, with you know blacks in particular. I'm serious about this. The big theatres downtown they accepted you. Accepted but you were not welcomes there. You know you get to see it when you looking back though. And this is the same thing that happened in the highs schools in this city here. Blacks were tolerated at other high schools because at that particular time, particularly in the '50s, late '50s, 6'0s they moved to different areas. And so consequently they were just tolerated. But what made Miller stand out all kids went there students whatever you want to call it we were accepted. And this is why we are able to draw each year for the last 40 years 6 or 7,000 people at our

annual get together because of acceptance. We didn't understand it then. Now that's deviation but you'll be, all right then.

MK: So your mom worked at a cleaner also in the neighborhood?

CP: Naw, yeah wait a minute. Now the cleaners on Oakland I believe. Then she retired as a custodial, custodian from the Adams Theatre.

MK: How long did you live on Hunt St?

CP: Lived on Hunt Street, let me back up for a moment. When we first came here we moved at 34, what's it 3428 Preston Street. Preston Street.

MK: Okay so you were on Preston first?

CP: Preston first. Then we moved on Hunt Street, in '43 I think some where like that. Because when we first, when I first came over here I went to Harris Elementary School.

MK: Which is where?

CP: Harris is on Pulford, its not there any more, Pulford and Ellery, eastside. Then we left there and we moved farther south on Hunt Street, and that's where uh at that particular time I went to Barbourr Intermediate in '45, but my oldest, my youngest sister, 2 little sisters, they went to as I said before Smith Elementary.

MK: Which is where?

CP: Smith is on Charlevoix and Ellery.

MK: Ok

CP: Further east, yeah, yeah and that's where it starts. And he lived on Hunt Street from '45 until '64 I believe. I wasn't home but I know the family lived there because I left and went to the army in '55.

MK: And was this a home you owned?

CP: No

MK: You rented all along?

CP: We rented all along, but we bought a home on, at 3988 Townsend.

MK: I know where Townsend is.

CP: Now let me clarify it so you can get a picture of it, you kids don't know anything about it. But it used to be that blacks didn't live farther east than East Grand Boulevard in fact blacks didn't stay on East Grand Boulevard, blacks didn't live on the Boulevard.

MK: Right

CP: But then we moved 4,5 3 blocks east of the Boulevard, my mother did and that's what happened. See many people don't know the history of this city. There was restaurants in this town that blacks were not accepted to eat in. And so we've seen a lot of things, a lot of changes in this city here and that's just changes. Like civilization those 3 things rise, mature, and decline. Right now I wonder rather we're rising, or we're matured, or whether we're declining, but this is the story of this city here though.

MK: When you went to Smith what were, were most of the kids African American, white?

CP: Let me explain this to you when I went to Harris Elementary, Harris Elementary all my teachers were white. At Smith School all teachers were white. I'm trying to think now. But there's one lady I hope she comes today her name is Zeline Richards.

MK: Right

CP: You met Zeline. She was the black young teacher at Smith. I think Zeline graduated from Wayne when she was 18, she was a smart kid. But in most of my life my elementary school, my junior high school there were all white teachers.

MK: Barbour was all white?

CP: All those school were white. Now the first time I met a black teacher was at Miller, Miller High School, it was a high school then.

MK: Who was it?

CP: Loving, Mr. Loving. L-O-V-I-N-G. Al Loving. Then there were counselors there. There were two counselors, black counselors one was name Leach, Nathaniel Leach.

MK: Nat Leach?

CP: Yea, Nat Leach.

MK: He was my counselor at Cass.

CP: Well that was 50 years later and then we had Lloyd Cofer.

MK: How's that spelled? C-O-F-E-R

CP: C-O-F-E-R, Lloyd Cofer and the principal there was name Mr. Daley, Mr. Charles Daley was the principal.

MK: He white?

CP: I'm telling you all white. You know they were white. But let me give you an instant story. When I was a 9th grader I attended Franklin Settlement. Franklin Settlement was a settlement that blacks gathered. You talk about a neighborhood? I wish we had more in Detroit today.

MK: Its still there, the building.

CP: 3360 Charlevoix. A white fellow there by the name of Joseph Beattie, B-E-A-T-T-I-E, Beattie, white fellow. And this was the first time I never known a man of a different color than me to be just like us, Beattie, Mr. Beattie. In fact Mr. Beattie was so influential in the area some kids would get in trouble and Beattie would send a note to the police station, "Turn this boy loose." I've seen that happen, fortunately I was the note carrier. But anyway when I first went to Miller I had a schedule of 1st hour study hall, 2nd hour shop, I don't know whatever. So I got back from Miller that day around 1 o'clock and Mr. Beattie said Charlie, Junior whatever he called me. He said, "Come here let me see you schedule." So, sure I showed him the schedule. So he said, "Tomorrow morning I want you to be here at 9 o'clock." So he was, I was happy so at least I get a free ride to school. So he took me down and told me to sit here and went into the office and he talked to Mr. Daley, and I'm trying to think of the assistant principal's name, I'm trying to think, I can't think of the assistant principal's name now. I can't think of his name, anyway they came back out, they came back out. And they said come here lets go. So they took me around Mr. Leach, Nathaniel Leach and they said I want his schedule changed. I looked at my schedule. I was so mad, Algebra, English 1 I was angry. But to tell you the truth that changed the destiny of my life. I really didn't understand it though because at that particular time we were gathered to our only upper mobility was to work at Ford Motor Company, but here's a guy here, a white fellow, Beattie changed the course of my life though and Mr. Beattie I'll never forget Mr. Beattie though.

MK: So you went to Miller '46, '47, when you'd start?

CP: I went to Miller in '46 but at that particular time though I didn't play basketball. I played at that Franklin Settlement but in '47 is when I was on the basketball team. I went on the basketball team.

MK: So tell me about the basketball program that you were in?

CP: At Miller?

MK: Yeah.

CP: Well we won, one of the reasons that we won, or going to be inducted into the Historical destination of Miller is because we won 4 consecutive Championships in basketball. And we had a great ball club a great ball team, well fellows. Many didn't reach their prowess because some fell by the wayside, but I'm looking at a picture now on that wall over there, that was us winning a championship almost 50, 60 years ago, right there. And you look all over we won championships. We had an outstanding coach. He didn't focus on, he had to focus on winning, we wasn't, you know, Vince Lombardi, said, "Winning is not everything," or something like that. But Rob was a good coach. He was a great motivator and I'm sure now looking back over the years, his motivation kept most of us in school because if that had not been so, in all probability we wanted immediate gratification in getting a job. And so a lot of fellows dropped out of school and worked at Ford and come back around school dressed up, looking nice and I know we wanted to emulate them, but Rob, Coach Will Robinson just kept us in school though and I used to be very thankful for that, very thankful for that though, very thankful.

MK: So after your graduation in '48.

CP: I didn't graduate from Miller until 1950.

MK: When you graduated from Miller what did you do?

CP: I went to Wayne University. First of all the University of Michigan they would not readily accept blacks, you know, and U of D also, so Joel Mason who was coach at Wayne University he told me, he said, "Now I want you to come to Wayne." Now looking back I would of gone to U of D, but U of D I don't know if they played blacks or not. They didn't have blacks on their ball club. But I think Callahan was ready to accept a black me on the team. But the day I was supposed to go to U of D, Callahan went on vacation. The coach from U of D, and so at that particular time there was a black fellow who went to Miller, had gone to Miller, Noah Brown, Dr. Noah Brown. He came to me and said, "Look Charlie I think Wayne would be your best shot." So I said let's go so we went over, we talked to the coach and he said, "This is it. I want you to come here. But there was also two more blacks from Northeastern, Johnnie Kline and Ernie Wagner there were three of us.

MK: Johnnie who?

CP: Johnnie Kline, K-L-I-N-E, Dr. Kline now and Ernie Wagner, we three went to Wayne University in 1950 and we were, as I said earlier I'm an egotist. We were rated in the top country, in the top United States so before that we had an athletic director by the, then they called all the press together, I'm jumping now. They called the press together.

MK: This is at Wayne?

CP: 1950, 1950.

MK: At Wayne?

CP: At Wayne University. So they asked Joel Mason, Coach said, "Mr. Mason we see that you have 3," I think they called us colored of negroes or something like that, they didn't say blacks, "Negroes" or "ballplayers." "Will they play?" So Mason stood up. He said, "If they're good enough to play, I'm going to play them." And I'm thinking of the athletic director, jumped up and said, "Now Joel, Joel wait don't say that now" and Joel said, "Mr. So and so I stand by my word if they make the ball club they will play if not I would like to resign now." Now Mason, looking back I didn't know if it was a joke or what. Stood up, here's a white fellow, stood up to other white fellow and all that and were the only 3 black folks sitting there and made that statement. But you know fate is a marvelous thing though. Two years later the university of Dayton offered Mason a contract to come and coach there, Kentucky or somewhere, naw 'cause Adolph _____ was at Kentucky, Joel Mason told us I've been offered this contract to coach there for 10 years or something, he said, but I promised you fellows that I would be with you from 1950 until 1954. This is the foundation seriously of it though. And that's what made us stay at Wayne University.

MK: Okay now lets go back now to when you were living on Hunt Street. Was the building a wood frame? What was it like?

CP: Oh yeah, wood frame. Let me say this. Wood frame, it was a one bedroom and it was a guess you can call it a living room. But anyway, that's where the heater was and my mother and my three sisters would sleep in one room. I would sleep, you know, where the heat, because I was about 11 or 12, 10 to 12, slept up there, so but prior to that, when we were living on Preston Street. I lived at 3428 Preston Street, it was a white fellow, an Italian fellow, lived there on Preston Street. They mostly were Italians, sure. There was a fellow lived two doors east of me by the name of Joe Altobelli. Joe Altobelli went on to become _____ with the Yankees, and then he was coach of the Yankees and all that.

MK: How do you spell that?

CP: A-l-t-o-b-e-l-l-i. Joe Altobelli. But anyway, we had a chore on Mondays, I would go with Joe to get coal, and on Thursdays, he would go with me. But anyway, one day I said Joe let's go. I was about 12 or 13. Joe said, "I don't have to go anymore." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "We have heat now." I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "Well, they put a furnace in the basement, a coal furnace." And so he said the only thing we have to do now is mash a button and heat comes up, but I didn't believe it, but anyway, went over and mashed a button, said wait a minute. Wait wait and about three minutes or something, it could have been that, I don't know, I heard a bloop, hot air. From that day on, I was never comfortable with hot and cold anymore. Exposure. This is what I tell kids now. Once you're exposed to better living, you don't want to live that way anymore and I was so glad, I was so glad when we got a furnace. Yeah, I was so glad. But anyway--

MK: So it was on Hunt between what and what?

CP: I was on Hunt 3374. I was on Hunt between Ellery and Elkwood. Between Ellery and Elkwood. I was on Preston St. between Ellery and Elkwood six blocks north.

MK: Did anybody else live in the house besides your family, or was it was just a single family house?

CP: Single family home. But there were, well--it's kind of hard to describe, because this was one home here. This was another place where my aunt lived, but it was separation. It was all the same address.

MK: What was her name?

CP: Vera Harris. That was my mother's sister. She's deceased now also. Vera Harris and there were three of them. Vera Harris. She had a daughter by the name of Bernice, which is deceased now and Eugene, they are all three deceased now. They lived in the front of the house, but we lived in the back of the house. All the same address though.

MK: Did you belong to a church. Was your mother religious?

CP: Yeah. My mother was religious.

MK: What church did you belong to?

CP: Old Calvary. It was on the corner of Clinton and Joseph Campau. Calvary Baptist Church, and in 1947, there was some kind of something, I don't know what happened, but anyway it was split and my mother [interruption]. So in 1947, I had made Miller's basketball team and I was practicing over at the Brewster Recreation Center, so when I got home, my mother told me said you're no longer a member of Old Calvary now. You're a member of New Calvary. In other words, she had taken our membership and moved it you know at that particular time.

MK: So where was New Calvary?

CP: New Calvary, at that particular time, they just split up. They used to have service at A. G. Wright Funeral Home.

MK: Which is where?

CP: It was on Forest, I think it was Forest and—what street is that? Forest and I can't think now, but A.G. Wright Funeral Home. Joseph T. Thomas was our pastor when it split up, Joe T. Thomas. And years later, they moved in 1949 or '50, they moved from A.G. Wright and then they moved on Concord and Stewart to New Calvary Baptist which is there today. And Old Calvary, Calvary Baptist now is on McDougall and Lafayette. It was split up in 1947. My mother was quite religious, very religious. Baptist.

MK: When you were attending Harris and Barbour, what was it like? I mean what did you do outside of school? What kind of daily activities were you involved in?

CP: Well, for us, we were very fortunate as I said earlier. The Franklin Settlement, was a savior for most of us, and I'm saying this serious though. You'll find some people, youngsters deviate from the path of rectitude. I don't care where they are hell, they in Heaven, I believe they can just go bad. We had a lot of our kids go bad. We had a lot to go on dope. We had a lot to just drop out, but basically, we had an outlet of the Franklin Settlement. You could go there anytime, they let you in. You know, that was home like, and I'll tell you something else about it, where you maintain your time, we were taught to keep it clean, and I'll tell you something, you never saw a window broke at Franklin Settlement. You better not see it, because the person who broke that window, he or she whomever would get beat up. You didn't throw stuff on the floor, you kept it clean though and I think, in fact I know this, the Franklin Settlement was the only place that we could go take a bath, shower, and so consequently it was like home though and so we focused ourselves at the Franklin Settlement. That's where we grew up, at the Franklin Settlement.

MK: Who else besides Mr. Beattie was involved with it? Do you remember any names?

CP: Miss Szymanski was the director, but Miss Szymanski was kind of bourgeoise. She dealt with, at that particular time there were the big wheels like Mrs. Ford and all those people. In fact, they used to come and park the cars and give me \$1.50 to watch their cars, but really they didn't need me to watch their cars, the chauffeurs would, so this I realized, and I didn't realize until later they were the ones who was paying for the tab at Franklin Settlement, you know.

MK: Do you remember her first name?

CP: I can't think of it, Miss Szymanski. We didn't know nobody by their first name. Miss Szymanski, what you talking about, first name?! Joseph Beattie, he was the guy, though, he was the guy we all would focus our attention on, Mr. Beattie. Whatever he said, he was superior dean over us.

MK: So, Szymanski and Beattie, anybody else in that operation you remember?

CP: No. Those were the two.

MK: What about other people. What about your friends who were there? Who else do you remember from that time that you hung out with at Franklin?

CP Oh, I hung out with from Harry Mackey, you met Harry Mackey before, though. So many, let me see. Charles Bailey. Charles Bailey was my captain, he was the captain of my high school basketball team. Chuck Bailey, Lou "Big Daddy" Lipscomb, so many-- Dale Robinson, Sammy Jean, Bobby Hall, too numerous to name.

MK: So besides basketball and kind of a home, what other kind of structured activities did they have, I mean, what did Franklin do, were there meals there. Did you eat at Franklin at all?

CP: No, you didn't eat at Franklin, they would provide social hour on Wednesdays, but at far as eating is concerned, you know you know you eat at home. In all probabilities though I believe though that there were some kids who could get food if they needed it from Franklin, but we were very fortunate enough that we didn't need it, so we really didn't pay much attention to that though.

MK: Did your family have a car?

CP: No. Oh no no no. No car.

MK: So you just got around by public transport or walking?

CP: Walking. Or bicycle. Yeah. I never owned a bike. I owned a bike, but I made my own bike, I took some [REDACTED] from here, from there and what not and made my own bike though and I called it Black Beauty. I used to ride on Belle Isle and everywhere though.

MK: You said Franklin and you mentioned Belle Isle, were there any other places that you would go to?

CP: I didn't cross Woodward until 19, go west of Woodward until 1949, '48 or '49. '49 I believe and guess what? Rob told us, that was the coach, we called him Rob. Rob told us that we were going away on a trip, we were playing Redford that week, for a long trip, and I didn't have anything to take, so I put my toothbrush in my bag you know I thought well, I really thought we were going on a long trip and we were going to Redford High School. What I think, though, we were confined to an area which we call Black Bottom. Confined in that area.

MK: What do you mean confined? Can you say a little more about that?

CP: Well, we were confined there because you couldn't buy homes any other place. You were confined in an area, Black Bottom, and if you check the statistics, there are more grads from Miller High School, Blacks, that went to college from 1919 through 1995. Why, because most Blacks went to Miller.

MK: They went to Miller you said?

CP: went to Miller oh yes, yes, we went to Miller.

MK: What about Northeastern, who went to Northeastern?

CP: As I said earlier, Wagner went to Northeastern, Johnnie Kline went to northeastern, I didn't socialize with those , you know. That was out of our main, that was enemy territory then for us though, so we--

MK: But there were Black students at Northeastern?

CP: There were Black students at Northeastern, yes there were.

MK: And they played on the Basketball team?

CP: They played on Northeastern's Basketball team and Northeastern would challenge Miller, which then all the schools would. Now Denby High School farther east there were no blacks at Denby. There were no blacks at a lot of schools. There were two or three blacks at Eastern. There were two or three blacks at Pershing. There was one black at Southeastern. Very few, very few from the thirties on until the sixties.

MK: What about going to the movies and things like that, bowling, pool, did you do any of that kind of stuff?

CP: You know, we went to Priscilla Theatre.

MK: Which is where?

CP: Priscilla's up north on Mt. Elliot, between Mr. Elliot and Charlevoix, but you know looking back, now this is just me now, I noticed that blacks sat on one side and whites on the other side. Now I don't know if it was designed that way or not but I do know that when we went there we were told, "This is a nice seat over here." Now I don't know if it was like that, if we had to or not but I know that's the way it happened looking back, though. But we paid no attention to it. We really paid no attention to it. We went to the Priscilla Theatre, we went to the East Side Theatre, the East Side Theatre was on Joseph Campau, Gratiot and Grandy. We went to the Rialto which was on Mt. Elliot and Gratiot.

MK: What about the Savoy and Catherine?

CP: That's down on Chene St. yea I went down there. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

MK: What about like going to the barber, did you have a local barber that you went to?

CP: Yeah

MK: Who was it?

CP: Knight, K-N-I-G-H-T, Knight.

MK: Where was he at?

CP: That's was years later. Knight was located on Joseph Campau and Maple, but before that I use to go a barber shop down the street from my house in '40. Mr.--I cant think of his name now. I'm trying to think. It was two brothers, right there on Ellery and Hunt Street at a Barber Shop there. Two brothers.

MK: On the corner?

CP: On the corner of Hunt and Ellery.

MK: Which corner was it?

CP: Ellery run north and south, right? It was on the southeast corner. Southeast corner and right behind the barber shop they had a Italian boy, Italian fellow had a shoe store. I'm trying to think of his name, he fixed shoes. And then down on Charlevoix there was a Fish Market on Charlevoix near McDougall. And what else was there?

MK: What about dentist, doctors? Did you go to a dentist of doctor?

CP: I had a doctor. Let me see, when was the first time I went to a doctor. I went to the doctor when I broke my leg. I broke my leg in '48, went to the doctor then. But there was a doctor that lived right across, he lived on Charlevoix by the name of Givens, black doctors.

MK: Givens?

CP: G-I-V-E-N-S, Donovan Givens was his name. I never did go to Dr. Givens. Never did, but then I went to Dr.--I'm trying to think of my doctors' name. He graduated from out of St. Louis, a seminary out of St. Louis, Dr.--I'll think of it in a minute though.

MK: What about dentist? Did you go to the dentist at all?

CP: No, I didn't go to no dentist. Didn't go to a dentist. Each year they would give us a dental check up. I don't know what it was. You have no cavities or something like that. But I never had no dentist. Never did. In fact to be honest about it my medical checkups were free because the school you know would give it to us.

MK: What about daily shopping? Food shopping or clothes shopping? Where did you family do that? Where'd you get your food, clothes and so on?

CP: I can't think of the clothing right now. But I can think of the food, we use to get food at Mabarak's. A fellow owned a grocery store, Mabarak on Hendricks and Ellery.

MK: How do you spell that?

CP: M-A, A Jew. I think it was a Jew. M-A-B-R-A-K or something like that, Mabrak was his name and you could go get food. Mama said, you know, give you a list and take it Friday or something like that.

MK: You mentioned there wrtr Italians and some Jewish store owners, racially and ethnically what were the relationships like in that area of the city?

CP: To be very honest with you it was a good area. Good area, you know. We had no problems, really, really and I'm serious about it. The whites in that area had no problems dealing with us. The blacks in that area had no problem dealing with whites. You know, my brother's keeper, that was very seriously what it was though. My brother's keeper. And I'll tell you something else if a white made a commitment they would keep their word and blacks would too, though. You didn't have to sign no paper or show id. Give me \$300, you didn't have to sign this or sign that. When you gon' pay me? Next week. You know and that's it. It was a good mixture of blacks and whites there.

MK: What about police in the neighborhood?

CP: Uh, the police were friendly to some people. But they would let you know at all times they were the boss. They were the boss. In fact they were all white police men. We had a black police man here by the name of Ben Turpin. I'm sure you've heard of Ben Turpin. Ben Turpin was the first black, you could go on record on this, that I've known to arrest a white man. Ben Turpin. Ben Turpin. He did it there on St. Aubin and Mack at the church, arrested a white man. And to tell you how we use to think then, 60 years ago, 50 years ago there was a fight when blacks first started to get on the force. There was a fight on Mack and Concord, two blacks fighting. And they called the police. And two blacks rode up, it just had started, that's before they integrated the cars. And a guy said send us the real police. That's how brainwashed we was. We didn't understand. They were thinking that black were no capable of becoming police men. Some blacks thought that though. Send us the real police men and I didn't pay much attention to them. But looking back 50 years ago you think of these things, though. It was over 50 years ago. But uh we considered uh

MK: Did you ever meet Ben Turpin?

CP: Oh yea Mr. Ben.

MK: What was he like? What did he look like?

CP: Heavy set, fat guy. Big belly. Wore 3 pistols. And if he liked you, you were all right. He'd do anything in the world for you. If he didn't like you, he would tell you, uh I don't like you pal. He called everyone pal. "Pal I don't like you." Now if you say anything I'm going to do something to you. That's what he would say. You better not say anything. Mr. Ben, everybody called him Mr. Ben though. Ben Turpin. And we always looked at the police in a derogatory way. They were out to take to tell you the truth. They were out to take and they kept the blacks kinds of subservient to them. But I don't care who you

are one day it's going to, the chick gon' break out the egg one day. And this what happened to, they had a bad police man by the name of Chudabacker [Chew Tobacco?], they called him.

MK: Chudabacker?

CP: Chudabacker, that's what they called him Chudacaker. The big four.. So one day it was a family disturbance somewhere up there on Hale and the Big Four jumps out and the guy shot his eye out. He just went berserk. I don't know what happened. Never, never happened to that guy that shot Chedabacker. There were a lot of police men who go the reputation of whooping blacks. A lot of them, yea. Ben Turpin got a reputation. Chudabacker, I'm trying to think of another police man that use to ride down Hastings Street. I cant think of his name, though. But police men we didn't have a favorable outlook on the police men, though never did. The way they treated us. Now some were all right, but you had to know them. In other words you didn't look at a uniform for protection, you looked at the uniform of being, that you were inferior to. And that's the wrong attitude though, so consequently you know youngsters hate the police men. You didn't like them until you knew them.

MK: What about crime in the neighborhood? Was there much crime?

CP: When you talk about crime, see crime, yeah there was a lot of crime but it was blacks on black and consequently that didn't go in the statistic like today though. If you break in my house you'd hear nothing about it. But now things have changed though to the point where it's news now. But years ago it wasn't news. And years ago probably the reason that there was less crime is because blacks didn't have anything, that's why they could leave their doors open. Anybody could leave their doors open, what you gon' take? Nothing. But sure we had crime there. We had crime and I did a dissertation one day on where education should start. I did this a few years ago though. What America, what we must do is realize the home is our first teacher. The home. And I think it should be mandatory, mandated that school system, or the health department, or the mayor's office, someone should inform all parents, look statistics show that you have a daughter or son 3 years o age now I know its going to hurt because a lot of kids die between 1 and 3, but our records show that he or she, if you intend [REDACTED] you have to be nice about it. In other words what you're saying look our records show that he's 3 now in order for him to enroll in kindergarten, 2 years from today, when he's 5 these are the things he must know or she must know. ABC's, how to count to 100, where you live, what's your parents name, things of nature. Now I don't care how destitute a parent may be, whether mother's on dope or dad's on dope.

MK: Uh I wanted to ask you are there any other people you remember from the neighborhood that sticks in your mind as people of colorful figures, you know you mentioned Ben Turpin, are there others, not necessary police officers, just you know, you know politicians, community people that stick in your mind at the time you were growing up?

CP: Charles Diggs.

MK: Okay

CP: Who else was there black>? Uh A.G. Wright. Uh, I'm trying to think, Diggs, Wright.

MK: What about the ministers that stand out particularly that stand out from the neighborhood, that area of the city that were powerful.

CP: Oh yeah, at Calvary Baptist. The preacher, I'm trying to think, that had Paul Robeson.

MC: Did Coleman Young go to Miller?

CP: No, Coleman went to Miller, but we use to laugh about it all the time. He didn't graduate from Miller though. See and I'm going to be very candid, to tell you the truth about it a lot of blacks didn't want to go to Miller. Seriously, Coleman was one of them. He's dead now, but that's the truth, though. In fact, many people were ashamed to say they were from Black Bottom until Coleman became mayor because Coleman did live in Black Bottom, but there were a few of us, Black Bottom that's all.

MK: Where did Coleman graduate from?

CP: He graduated from a Catholic School. Eastern I believe or a Catholic School one of the two, though or got his GED I don't know.

MK: What about you? After you graduated from Wayne what did you do?

CP: I started working for the Globetrotters. Then I came back to Detroit to start teaching.

MK: How long were you with the Globetrotters?

CP: 4years.

MK: So you graduated about--

CP: '54

MK: So until '58 we were with the Globetrotters. You traveled around the world?

CP: Yes

MK: What was that like? What was the experience?

CP: I didn't make any money. I hate to talk about it. I really hate to talk about that, really. We were exploited and I'm serious about this. In fact I'm going to Phoenix next

something to see Mannie, that's the owner of the Trotters now, he say he own them but I don't know. But anyway, we didn't make any money. My highest salary was \$700 a month. I hate to talk about it now when I see guys now making millions. They make more, I laugh about it sometimes they make more of me eating money then we made in a whole month. They get \$150 they eat off of something like that. But uh anyway I had a lot of fun. Then I came here and I went to uh I started teaching in Southwest Detroit, Bennett School it was comprised of mostly Hispanics, you know Mexicans. And then I left there and went to a youth home, a youth farm is a detention facility, juvenile delinquencies and I stayed there until I retired. I became principal there, the head administrator.

MK: Where was it at?

CP: On Forest

MK: And what?

CP: Forest at the express way. Right there at Forest, well right now its Lincoln facility, juvenile detention home.

MK: Did you ever get married?

CP: Oh yea

MK: Did you have any kids?

CP: I have two kids. I had a boy he's 40, 39 and my daughter is 35,36.

MK: Do they live in the area?

CP: One lives on Outer Drive, West Outer Drive and one lives on Cherrylawn.

MK: And what do they do?

CP: My son is a executive at Ford and my daughter is a school teacher for the last 16 years.

MK: And where did they go to school?

CP: Cass Tech, U of D and both went to black colleges. My son went to Delaware State and my daughter went to--in Ohio, what's that school in Ohio?

MC: Wilberforce.

CP: Right across from Wilberforce.

MC: Central State

CP: Central State, yes. My wife was an administrator. She retired. We're both retired now. I work harder now taking care of my grandkids than you know.

MK: When did your mother pass away?

CP: Mother passed away--12 years ago. My dad's been dead 60, 70 years. Let me call my sister and ask her.

MK: So your mom was born was on 1907 and she died in 1994. Did you guys live on the Townsend address for a long time after you bought the house there?

CP: I never

MK: You didn't live there.

CP: 3374 was where I lived, most of my life.

MK: And then when she moved in '64, '65 over to Townsend.

CP: When did she move there? I forgot.

MK: I think you said '64.

CP: I don't know, maybe I was wrong.

[Charlie calls his sister]

CP: April 1958.

MK: And after that she lived on Townsend.

CP: No that's when we moved on Hunt Street

MK: So then from '58 on she lived on Townsend.

CP: Yeah, my mother did. I never did. I was gone then. I was a man then. I had been around the world four of five times by then.

MK: You guys have any questions you want to ask? Okay, great it worked out real well.