

RUFUS APPLE
11.8.03

MK: This is Marian Krzyzowski and I'm here with Monique Claiborne, Sara Anderson, and Danny Katz at the home of Mr. Rufus Apple in west Detroit and today is November 8, 2003. We're here to talk to Mr. Apple about his memories of the Black Bottom, the Chene Street area, and his experiences at Miller High School and I'd like to begin first though by asking you a little bit about your background. One of the things we do in these interviews is find out where people's families came from and how they ended up in that neighborhood. So the first thing I'd like to ask you is the names of your folks or grandparents, or whoever it was that came from wherever they came to Detroit. So, do you want to begin with your parents?

RA: Okay, my parents came from Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

MK: And what were their names?

RA: My mother's name was Fannie Mae Patterson, Fannie Mae Apple after she got married, and my father's name was Pruitt Apple.

MK: Were they married down in Tennessee?

RA: They were married down in Tennessee.

MK: Do you know how old they were and when they were born?

RA: Yeah. My father was born in 1895 and Ma was born in 1900.

MK: What did your dad do, did he work down in Tennessee?

RA: I reckon he was a blacksmith and then when he moved to Detroit, he moved to Detroit in 1926, yeah, in 1926 he moved to Detroit, and then he worked for Chene Coal Company and then the big Depression came in '29, '30, you know, big Depression time, and then we went on welfare, and then the social worker told daddy and mama that they had to take us to the soup kitchen for breakfast and dinner. But instead of taking us to the soup kitchen, daddy went out and got a hundred pounds of ice and sold it for ten cent per twenty-five pounds in a little red wagon that we had.

MK: So he became an ice man?

RA: He became an ice man and then the social worker found out what he was doing and she said, "I'm not going to let you stay on welfare, I'm going to get you a job at Fords." Then the social worker got him a job at Fords, it must have been '32 or '33. Something like that.

MK: Which Ford plant?

RA: Dearborn. Rouge Plant.

MK: So where were you born?

RA: I was born in Tennessee.

MK: What year were you born?

RA: 1922

MK: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

RA: My oldest brother James, he was born in 1917 and my second oldest brother was born in 1920. Yeah John was born in 1920.

MK: His name is John?

RA: I'm Rufus, I was born in '21, I mean '22. My youngest brother Richard, he was born in '20, and my sister, she was born in 1932.

MK: And what was her name?

RA: Nancy.

MK: Okay, so all of them but Nancy were born down in Tennessee?

RA: Right.

MK: When you guys came up to Detroit, do you know what that was about? Did they have family here or friends, or did they just come up because they knew there were jobs? Why did they come to Detroit?

RA: Well, Daddy had a brother here and he came up because his brother was here.

MK: Do you remember his brother's name?

RA: Reggie Apple

MK: And he lived in Detroit. Do you know where in Detroit he lived?

RA: He lived on Sherman, it was the 1900 block of Sherman, I don't know the address or nothing like that.

MK: Okay, so when you guys came up, how did you come up?

RA: On the train.

MK: On a train? So you came in through Michigan Central?

RA: Yeah.

MK: Okay. So how did you get from there to where you were going?

RA: Daddy's brother picked us up.

MK: Okay. So you lived with your uncle then?

RA: We lived with my uncle for about a year. He didn't have any children.

MK: Do you remember his house at all, what it looked like?

RA: It was just an old frame house.

MK: Two story. One story.

RA: It was two stories.

MK: And you guys lived upstairs or downstairs?

RA: We lived upstairs.

MK: And after a year, what happened?

RA: After that? Then my uncle bought a house on 2755 Antietam Street and that's where we grew up.

MK: What kind of house was that? What did that look like?

RA: That was a frame house.

MK: Also two stories?

RA: Yeah.

MK: And did you guys live upstairs or downstairs?

RA: We lived upstairs.

MK: 2755 Antietam is between what and what?

RA: It's between Joseph Campau and Chene.

MK: So that's probably what, 1927, '28 or something like that?

RA: Yeah.

MK: Then you would have been almost five then, about five or six then. So you would have started school back then?

RA: I started school at Duffield.

MK: What do you remember about Duffield?

RA: Duffield was one of the best schools, one of the most beautiful schools you'd ever want to be in. A real nice school.

MK: What made it nice?

RA: I don't know. At that particular time, it just seemed like the teachers were so much better then than they are now. That's what seemed to have made it nice.

MK: What about the kids? Were most of the kids African American or was there a mixture of white kids?

RA: It was a mixture of white kids, because the white kids came from Lafayette, Larned, Jefferson. That's where the white kids come from and at that particular time, there were only two black teachers there.

MK: Do you remember their names?

RA: One was Miss McGee and the other one was Miss Bristol. Miss Bristol's husband was an undertaker and he had an undertaker shop right across the street from the school and Miss McGee's daddy, he was a doctor. They lived down on Joseph Campau near Larned.

MK: Was it called the Bristol Funeral Home?

RA: Yes. It was Bristol's Funeral Home.

MK: And all the other teachers were white, the principal was white?

RA: Oh yeah and there was one black lady that worked in the office.

MK: Do you remember her name?

RA: Mary Jane Martin, Scott—it was Scott before she got married. Mary Jane Scott.

MK: Duffield was right on Chene right? Duffied was on Chene?

RA: Well, the playground was on Chene, but Duffield was really between Joseph Campau and Chene on Clinton Street.

MK: Can you describe the school building, what it looked like, and where were the main entrances and so on?

RA: It was a great big beautiful building, it's still standing. It's a great big beautiful building and the main entrance was on Clinton and the back entrance was on Macomb. They still have reunions.

MK: Do you go to those reunions?

RA: Uh huh.

MK: When do they have them?

RA: Usually in May.

MK: Do you remember any of the kids that were in the school while you were there? I know it was a long way back.

RA: Yeah. One girl's name was Gertrude Trautman.

MK: was she white or was she black?

RA: She's black and I just saw her last Sunday at church and I can't recall her name. Me and her started school on the same day.

MK: No kidding and you still see her?

RA: Uh huh. Margaret Harris. Charles Diggs, Jr. He graduated the same time I did.

MK: No kidding. Did you see him after?

RA: Did I see him after? Yeah. I've seen him several times after because I would go to the dinner for the NAACP and he would usually be there even when he got to be a big wheel.

MK: Okay. When you were at school, was there any place that was a hangout for kids? Was there a candy store or something?

RA: Oh yeah.

MK: Tell me about it. What was it? Where was it?

RA: There was a candy store on Clinton and Joseph Campau.

MK: Which corner?

RA: Okay, if you were going south, it would be on the south corner of Clinton.

MK: On Campau. It would be on the south side of Clinton. West or east?

RA: West.

MK: So southwest corner. Was it white owned, black owned?

RA: It was black owned

MK: Do you remember the people who owned it?

RA: No I don't

MK: What do you remember about the store itself?

RA: Kids used to come in there and hang out and get candy and stuff and go on about their business.

MK: You would come there after school usually?

RA: Usually after school.

MK: At that time, did Duffield go to sixth grade or eighth grade?

RA: Duffield at that time, Duffield went to the sixth grade.

MK: And then what happened after that?

RA: And then after that, Miller became a high school and then they took the eighth grade out of Miller and put it in Duffield.

MK: I see. So they eventually converted Duffield to a first to eighth grade school?

RA: Yeah.

MK: And then you would go straight from there to Miller.

RA: Right, right, right, because at that time it was so tough, kids didn't have the money to take the bus to go to places like Eastern, Cass--

MK: Right.

RA: So they made Miller a High School.

MK: So you were in Duffield until eighth grade?

RA: Uh huh.

MK: Okay. When you were in the seventh or eighth grade, did you do any sports? What kind of stuff did you do when you were in those upper grades at Duffield?

RA: I carried papers.

MK: Which paper did you carry?

RA: Times.

MK: What was your route?

RA: My route was Antietam, Joseph Campau, I'll say from Vernor Highway to Mullett Street. From Joseph Campau to Chene.

[Phone rings]

MK: You delivered on Chene Street itself?

RA: Uh huh.

MK: So, what blocks of Chene Street would that have been?

RA: That would have been more or less from Antietam down to Clinton Street.

MK: Were there any businesses in that stretch or were they mostly homes?

RA: On Chene Street there were quite a few businesses and theaters. There were two theaters on Chene Street.

MK: Can you tell me about that?

RA: Well, it was Savoy Theatre. Savoy Theatre was, going south, was on the right side of Chene

MK: Yeah, it was on the west side of Chene

RA: And the Catherine Theatre was on the east side of Chene and they were more or less just like that, right across the street from each other.

MK: Did you go to movies there? Why would you go to one or the other? What the difference between the two theatres?

RA: Well, whichever show you thought was the best.

MK: Was one of them considered a better theater that was nicer or not?

RA: They were about the same, not really. Just the pictures that were playing. There was a fellow that hung around the Catherine and if you were under age you couldn't be caught in the show after twelve o'clock on Saturday night because they had what you call a double feature. You went to the Saturday show and you would see the Sunday show, I mean starting next week you know.

MK: So you had to be over a certain age to do that?

RA: The midnight show. Huh?

MK: You have to be over a certain age?

RA: That's right. You had to be over a certain age to stay in the show that long.

MK: Did kids try to sneak in and stay in?

RA: Oh yeah.

MK: Did you?

RA: Uh no.

MK: Why not?

RA: I didn't want to get kicked out.

MK: When you'd go to the show who did you go to the show with? Who did you go to the movies with? [INTERRUPTION IN RECORDING]

RA: It was on Wednesday night

MK: Ok, Did your mom ever go to get dishes then?

RA: No

MK: And beside the Savoy and the Catherine what other businesses do you remember along that stretch?

RA: There was a Chene Street Bar on Sherman and Madison. There was a drug store on Antietam and Chene.

MK: Were they, do you know if they were white or black owned?

RA: The drug store was black owned. His name was Floree.

MK: What was his name?

RA: Floree.

MK: Florene?

RA: Floree, F-L-O-R-E-E something like that

MK: Okay and that was on the corner of what and what, now?

RA: Hm?

MK: That was on the corner of...

RA: That was on the corner of Antietam and Chene.

MK: Antietam and Chene

RA: Then there were some cleaners up and down the street on Chene.

MK: James Floree Drugs, yeah I got it right here.

RA: All right, all right, all right

MK: And it says right across the street from him was a billiards place.

RA: Yeah, a poolroom

MK: Poolroom, right. Do you remember that poolroom?

RA: Mmm Hmm

MK: Did you play pool there?

RA: No, better not be caught in a pool room at that age. Not at that time

MK: What else do you remember around that neighborhood?

RA: There was a bunch of, it was some cleaners up and down the street.

MK: It says here on the corner of Chestnut there was a Joe Decker, it was a tailor.

RA: Yeah

MK: I'm going down Chestnut now, up Chestnut actually, World Wonder Medicine Company up on Chene north of there, a beauty shop. Let me see what else we got here, a beer garden, a bar, Abby Reynolds Beer Garden.

RA: What street is that on?

MK: This is on Chene, I'm going

RA: I know, I know

MK: Between Chestnut and Antietam

RA: Okay

MK: Then there's a Commonwealth Club, it must have been like a night club of some sort, a candy store.

RA: Yea, I remember the candy store

MK: George William's Candy, then a cosmetic company. Now moving up if you go up past Antietam, a restaurant. John Louis Restaurant, do you remember that at all?

RA: Yeah

MK: I'm curious where did you, where did your folks do their shopping for clothes and shoes and stuff.

RA: Okay, there was a store on, on Joseph Campau near Vernor Highway, Lieberman's Clothing Store. That's where they bought all our clothes from.

MK: It was on Vernor or was it on Campau?

RA: No it was on Joseph Campau.

MK: Okay, south of Vernor?

RA: Yes, south of Vernor

MK: And what side of the street? On the west or east side?

RA: West

MK: The west side, south of Vernor, Lieberman's. Was it a dry goods store? Was it a clothing store?

RA: It was a clothing store. They had all kinds of clothes for adults, children, everybody, you know.

MK: What about shoes? Where did you guys get your shoes?

RA: We bought our shoes there too.

MK: You also bought your shoes there. Was it a popular store? A lot of people from the neighborhood?

RA: It seems like everybody went there.

MK: Okay, okay. What about barbershops? Going to the barber you, your dad, your brothers.

RA: Well there was four kids, daddy was the barber.

MK: Daddy was the barber. What about his hair? Where'd he go?

RA: Where'd he go? Where did daddy go? There was a barber shop on Joseph Campau that's where he went. I forget the name of the barbershop but that's where he went.

MK: Campau and what? Between what and what? Do you remember?

RA: Huh?

MK: Between what and what was it?

RA: Between Antietam and Chestnut?

MK: Did you guys belong to a church?

RA: Mm hm

MK: What church did you belong to?

RA: Calvary Baptist Church.

MK: And where was it at that time?

RA: Calvary Baptist Church was on Joseph Campau between Clinton and Macomb.

MK: Okay, what side of the street?

RA: South, south side.

MK: It was on Campau, you're saying Joseph Campau? So it was either west, east side of west side of Joseph Campau?

RA: It was the east side of Joseph Campau.

MK: And who was the pastor do you remember back then?

RA: Uh, yes James Henry Mastin.

MK: How's that spelled, Mastin?

RA: M-A-S-T-I-N

MK: Okay, so services were at what time? Your whole family went?

RA: Yeah, Sunday school was at 9 o'clock, you went to Sunday school and then from the Sunday school we went to, stayed for church and then from church after you stayed for church you'd go home and you ate and then you went back to **V.I.P.U.** You went back at night and you stayed for night service. That's all you did on Sunday. You didn't go to the show on Sunday, not at that time.

MK: So how'd you feel about that?

RA: What?

MK: Spending the whole day in church?

RA: That was only natural because you've done it all your life.

MK: Was there a youth group associated?

RA: Oh yeah

MK: What did the youth group do?

RA: There was a youth choir.

MK: Were you in the choir?

RA: Mm hm. They had a youth choir.

MK: How big a congregation was it? How many people were there?

RA: At that particular time there must have been about 1200 people. It was a big church.

MK: Very big, very big. Were there other churches in the area there that you remember?

RA: Okay, your major churches, there was 2nd Baptist.

MK: Which was where?

RA: That's on Monroe between Brush and St. Antoine, and then Macedonia, that was on Clinton, Mullett and Macomb, Mullett and St. Aubin, and Church of our Father was on I think it was on Madison, I believe it was on Madison between the railroad and St. Aubin and that was your four major churches. And Bethlehem Temple that was on, it was on Clinton between Chene and Dubois.

MK: Did these churches have, the congregation in these churches, was there a difference in them? Were some of them wealthier people went to or people of, was there a difference in kind of social makeup of the churches?

RA: It seemed at that particular time 2nd Baptist, the people in the higher class went to 2nd Baptist. And then sometime, then there was a park in the center between, on Joseph Campau between Chene no between Mullett, no, okay--the park was oh yeah, Mullett and Clinton, there was a little park and we used to wade in it sometime, but on Saturday night, I mean on Sunday morning a lot of times you'd find a car in the swimming pool because you either go this way or you go that way. And some people didn't go this way or that way they went straight and wound up in the swimming pool. And then they put dirt in it and made a watcha call it, they put dirt in it and made a flower bed. You know? Put flowers in it.

MK: At the park or any other public places, that park or the other public open areas was there any live music? Did people--did they have bands out there on certain, on weekend nights or weekdays, Sundays?

RA: Sometimes, yeah, yeah, yeah

MK: What about when you went to high school so you started high school, you're born in '22, so you would have been 14, 15? So it was '36 or something like that?

RA: When I started high school. You said when I started high school?

MK: Yeah. So '36, '37.

RA: Yeah.

MK: Okay and what are your memories of Miller? I mean speaking of, like, with the teachers.

RA: Well, at that particular time, you had some of the black teachers at Miller and all I can say really is that they were pretty doggone good.

MK: Were most of the kids black at Miller?

RA: Yeah, most of them were black.

[INTERRUPTION]

MK: Graduating class picture here. Yeah, most of them are African American. Where are you in this picture?

RA: It's been a long time since I looked at it, I have to find myself.

[looking]

MK: Yup. There you are. That's great. Right there. So besides the two African American teachers, what about the other teachers? Do you remember much about them and I'm curious too, what it was like as far as the relationships between the white teachers and black students.

RA: There was no difference. There was no difference.

MK: So there was no tension, no hostility?

RA: NO. No uh uh. On Antietam, there was an Italian boy that lived right next door to me and I used to stay all night with him sometimes and he would come and he would stay all night with me sometimes.

MK: What was their name?

RA: Arena.

MK: Do you know how that's spelled?

RA: A-R-E-N-A, something like that.

MK: Okay, and how old was he, your age? Do you know his first name?

RA: Benny.

MK: When you were in school either at Duffield or beginning high school, did you play any sports?

RA: No

MK: No sports?

RA: No..

MK: What did you do in high school for fun?

RA: I tried to study what I had to study and just like I said, get home and carry papers.

MK: So it wasn't a lot of fun it sounds like.

RA: No I didn't play sports.

MK: What about, did you go to dances, go out on dates and stuff? Where would you be going like on a date or, you know, for dancing?

RA: Well, for a date you would take them to a show. And for dancing there were a hall, there was a hall. I'm trying to think about what street that was on where we would go dancing. I'm just trying to think of the street. I can't remember like I used to.

MK: What kind of hall was it? I mean was it a straight, just a dance hall or was there other stuff going on in there?

RA: Other stuff going on in there.

MK: It wasn't one of the big ones? You know like the Graystone?

RA: No, no, no it wasn't no Graystone, no, uh uh.

MK: Did you go out at all to restaurants or anything like that? Any place to eat outside of the home?

RA: There was a Young's Bar BBQ on Mullett and Dubois. People come from all over the city, come there to get their barbeque and that was about the only place we went.

MK: Where exactly was it? What corner of Mullett and Dubois was it?

RA: The west corner, on the west side of the street. On the west corner.

MK: Southwest? Or northwest?

RA: Southwest.

MK: Southwest. What did it look like?

RA: It was just a little small place, just a little small place just like you had a backroom back there. Where they do the cooking and people, and people out here, people out here would be waiting for their orders.

MK: It was strictly takeout?

RA: It was strictly takeout.

MK: And uh--

RA: See black people couldn't go in a place and eat. We couldn't, you could _____ and stuff like that, we couldn't even eat in a ten cent store downtown.

MK: Can you say some more about that?

RA: Huh?

MK: Can you say some more about that?

RA: Not eating in ten cent stores downtown?

MK: Yea

RA: Well uh I mean, at that time ten cent stores were real popular and there was one down there on Woodward near Michigan. I forget was it Kresge's or Woolworth. I don't know exactly where. I think it was Kresge, anyway. If you go in there and sit down and decide to eat, and get ready to eat they would tell you that they didn't serve black people. We did go, we could go to the Michigan Theatre, the Fox Theatre, the Family Theatre downtown. But you couldn't eat no place downtown.

MK: What about any black owned restaurants in the Black Bottom, what about those?

RA: There wasn't too many, I mean, just a very few.

MK: What about clubs?

RA: Night clubs?

MK: Yeah

RA: Oh, okay night clubs I really didn't know anything about them not until after I came out of the service and the central location was Beaubien and St. Antoine, Beaubien and, no St. Antoine, all up and down St. Antoine Street, Hastings Street, Adams, Adams

Street, that's were the club 666's [3 Sixes] were. They had shows, just like dancing girls, just like they did in New York. And Flame Show Bar. That's where Dinah Washington used to come.

MK: Where was the Flame Show Bar?

RA: Oh gosh, John R. I can't think of that cross street. It was on John R.

MK: John R

RA: And Chesterfield Lounge and that part of town was really jumping, there.

MK: What year are we talking about?

RA: I'm talking about '46, well it started in the early '40s but I'm talking about '46 let's just say from '40, '41 on up

MK: So you were in high school till about, till '41. You graduated from high school what did you do?

RA: Okay, what'd I do? I worked at Fords for, I think I got a job at Fords in 1941 in May.

MK: At Rouge?

RA: Um hmm. And then I saw the war was coming, I mean the war was coming, so I went to the Detroit Institute of Commerce following working at Fords, and got a commercial education. And then I was drafted. I was drafted on February 1st, 1943 and soon as I was drafted I was put in the office.

MK: Where at?

RA: That was the base, Fort Sill Oklahoma. And then I stayed in Fort Sill, Oklahoma, we stayed in Fort Sill, Oklahoma until I think it was, around about September of '43 and then from there went to the desert in California, and stayed on the desert in California until April of '44 and then from there I went to Europe.

MK: And you were in Europe for how long?

RA: April '44 to December 6, I think around December 6, '45.

MK: So you went to England first?

RA: We landed in, what was it, now let's see, Scotland, no not Scotland, what was it

MK: It was the United Kingdom anyway?

RA: Yeah, United Kingdom, yeah.

MK: And then did you move from there over to the continent at all?

RA: And from there, I believe from there I went to France.

MK: When was that?

RA: The 30th of June '44.

MK: So it was not long after D Day

RA: Not long after D Day. That's when all the--

MK: Yeah, wow. So then you returned back to Detroit.

RA: Came back to Detroit in, I got home Christmas Eve '45

MK: And where, your folks were living still with your uncle?

RA: No, no, no. My dad bought a house on McDougall between Antietam, McDougall between Waterloo and Vernor Highway.

MK: And what was the address on that McDougall house?

RA: Huh?

MK: The address, do you remember the address?

RA: 2421

MK: 2421, okay. And when did they buy that house?

RA: In '39

MK: So before the war then?

RA: Yeah, it was before the war, yeah.

MK: Okay, and what kind of house was it? What did it look like?

RA: It was a big house. Living room down, living room down, living room, kitchen and a great big entrance when you come in, room when you came in. And upstairs it was 3 bedrooms.

MK: Was it brick or wood?

RA: No, it was wood. Nice big house. Nice house.

MK: 2421 would have been on the west side of the street.

RA: That's right, west side of McDougall.

MK: And so who were your neighbors at that point? Do you remember who your neighbors were?

RA: There was an Italian family on one side. In fact we were the first blacks to move on that block.

MK: No kidding.

RA: There was a Italian family on the left of us, left side. And all the rest down the street was white. Same on the other side of the street, it was all white.

MK: So what was it like being the first black family?

RA: No problem. Everybody was real nice.

MK: So you would have been '39 you would have been in Miller then.

RA: Huh

MK: You would have been going to Miller High School.

RA: I went to Miller that's where I went.

MK: Do you remember, I can't remember, maybe Monique can help me the **Burrells** and Joe Louis they bought a bunch of houses up on McDougall but it was south of that.

RA: McDougall and Chestnut.

MK: Do you remember any of them? Did you have much interaction with them? Did you ever, any social interaction with them?

RA: Well you see, at that time, the only time you saw them was when they come to church. They went to the same church we went to.

MK: They went to Calvary?

RA: Mmm hmm. I see Joe Louis's niece now. One of his nieces now.

MK: Is that Ernestine Cox?

RA: That's Ernestine Cox, yes.

MK: When you returned then from the service in Europe in Christmas of '45 you moved back in with your folks on McDougall? And what did you do then?

RA: Okay, I went back to work at, I put in for, to be a, I went to Wayne and put in an application for a mortician. They said it could be 5 years before they could call me. Well true enough in 5 years they called me but I had changed my mind. Well I worked at Fords for, up until about '46. I worked at Fords 'til about '47, about a year, and then I went to, I started working at a drug store on Mullett and St. Aubin and I worked there for about 3 years.

MK: What was the name of the drugstore?

RA: S&L.

MK: And it was on St. Aubin?

RA: It was on St. Aubin. St. Aubin on the south side.

MK: Was it the corner?

RA: On the corner. St. Aubin on the south side

MK: Okay, St. Aubin and, what was that?

RA: Mullett.

MK: Mullett. Let me take a look at it. The northwest corner was the Macedonia Baptist Church.

RA: It was right across the street from the Macedonia Baptist Church.

MK: It was right across the street from the church?

RA: Uh huh.

MK: Okay, so it was right across the street from the church and it's called S&L What did it look like, do you remember? If you were standing out in front of it what did it look like?

RA: Well, it wasn't bad. I mean it was a nice looking store.

MK: Was there a sign in the window or up above it?

RA: There was a sign up above. A hanging sign up above.

MK: Was it a brick building?

RA: A brick building.

MK: And was there glass there an entrance or not. What did it look like when you were walking into the place? The entrance was on St. Aubin?

RA: Yeah, St. Aubin. You walked in on St. Aubin.

MK: It wasn't a corner entrance or anything?

RA: No

MK: So, was there glass on both sides?

RA: Glass on both sides.

MK: And was it white owned or black owned?

RA: It was Jewish owned

MK: Do you know the guys who owned it?

RA: Morris **Stedman** and Harry Levine.

MK: What hours did you work there?

RA: I think it was three to eleven or something like that.

MK: What were your responsibilities? What would you do in there?

RA: Well, I mostly sold, I was what you called the liquor clerk. At one time they sold more liquor than any store in the state.

MK: No kidding. You worked six days a week, five days a week, four days a week?

RA: I worked six days a week.

MK: Okay, so you didn't work Sunday then. Were they in the store? Was Stedman or Levine in the store?

RA: Well, most of the time neither of them was in the store until Sunday. My brother James, he was a pharmacist, so he took care of the store on Sunday by himself more or less.

MK: Where did he get his pharmacy education?

RA: It was in Detroit. I can't say right now.

MK: Okay. If you remember it later on. So you worked there for three years and then what? That was like about 1950 probably, something like that, right

RA: What?

MK: Till 1950

RA: Yeah. Wait a minute, I worked there longer than that because from there I went to El Producto Cigar Company.

MK: Which was where?

RA: At that time it was on Meyers, Meyers near Fenkell.

MK: What year would that been?

RA: That would have been about, I know when I started, it was '63, I started in 63.

MK: You started at El Producto in '63? So you must have been at the drug store a long time.

RA: Yeah. I was a salesman there.

MK: At El Producto?

RA: Yeah.

MK: So let's go back now to, you started, you're working at Ford and then you switched to the drug store. What about the club. Can you tell me more about the night life and so on on Hastings and St. Antoine.

RA: Well, at that particular time, you could walk any place you wanted to walk at night and nobody bothered nobody. People would come from all around the U.S. to go to the clubs in Detroit.

MK: Did you go to the clubs?

RA: I used to go to the clubs

MK: So who do remember seeing and hearing at the clubs?

RA: Dinah Washington, Sara Vaughn, Al Hebley, Big Maybelle, practically all of them.

MK: What about any of the jazz musicians, any of the tenor players, anybody like that come down there like that you'd see?

RA: You'd see them usually at the Paradise Theatre.

MK: Which is where?

RA: That's on Woodward. Paradise Theatre's on Woodward. And they'd bring a big band every week. They had Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Cab Calloway, all of them, you know. They'd come and stay a week. And usually when they got through playing, they would come down to the clubs, you know.

MK: Were the clubs mixed racially. I mean, did white people and black people go there?

RA: Just a few white people went there. Every once in a while, you would run across a few white people come in.

MK: So it was pretty much black?

RA: It was, it was, yeah.

MK: A black thing. Okay, and was that weekends or was that kind of opened all week?

RA: All week. All week long.

MK: And how far north would it go with the clubs? How far did they go?

RA: It went from Gratiot more or less to the Boulevard. Gratiot to Milwaukee Street.

MK: On Hastings and St. Antoine?

RA: On Hastings, St. Antoine

MK: And when you went did you walk down there? How did you get there? The street cars or what? What was the deal?

RA: How did I get there? I had a car. And before I had a car I used to ride the streetcar down there.

MK: What streetcars would run down there?

RA: The Gratiot

MK: So from McDougall, how would you get over there? How'd you get from your house on McDougall, you know, to Hastings?

RA: All I had to do was walk down to Joseph Campau. The bus would come down there, the streetcar would come down Waterloo and carry you downtown wherever you wanted to go.

MK: Which line was it, do you remember the name of the line?

RA: Kercheval.

MK: Kercheval line? And it would take you downtown?

RA: Um hm

MK: And then how would you get up north?

RA: Well you could get off there street car whenever you're ready. You could get off at St. Antoine or wherever.

MK: And you'd just walk up then?

RA: Umm hmm, walk up a block or so.

MK: Any particular club that was a favorite of yours that you liked the most?

RA: I used to like the BNC.

MK: BNC?

RA: Umm hmm

MK: Where was that at?

RA: That was on St. Antoine and Beaubien, Beacon.

MK: Beacon?

RA: B-E-A-C-O-N

MK: And what did you like about it? What was the club?

RA: It was just uh, the entertainment was nice. It was just nice.

MK: Was it a big club, small club?

RA: It was kind of small. And the 666's [Three Sixes] was nice too. That was a big club.

MK: Where was that?

RA: It was on Adams between St. Antoine and Beaubien I think.

MK: Did it have a marquee in front? What did it look like? Did it have--

RA: Oh, it was pretty. It looked just like a New York Club.

MK: A lot of lights?

RA: A lot of lights, yes.

MK: And you said it was safe, right?

RA: Oh yeah, nobody would bother nobody then.

MK: What about, talking about crime, but not so much crime, I'm wondering like what about numbers? And the kind of the mutuals and stuff like that? Can you say anything about that?

RA: That was the thing that was going then. Practically everybody played the numbers and the cops would be after them all the time.

MK: Yeah, I was talking to people who said the only reason a lot of those little stores survived is because they sold numbers.

RA: Uh-hmm. And the cops were after them all the time.

MK: I talked to a white guy who sold newspapers up further north Chene on Chene and Milwaukee and he sold, you know, he made money selling numbers while selling papers, you know. Any other kind of activities that you recall that, you know, were kind of a gray in the area? Was there much, this was before your time, moon shining?

RA: What?

MK: Prohibition was in '32 up 'til 33.

RA: Oh yeah well the Detroit River here, during Prohibition the cops used to go after these guys who were bringing whiskey from Canada and they would dump it over board and they have no case. Now there's a lot of whiskey down on the bottom of that river.

MK: What about the police in the neighborhood? Were there black police officers?

RA: Very few

MK: Do you remember any at all.

RA: One was named Ben Turpin.

MK: What do you remember about Ben Turpin?

RA: Ben Turpin, you didn't mess around with Ben Turpin. Everybody knew if Ben Turpin said something you done it. He used to hang around the Catherine show a lot.

MK: He was a tough guy?

RA: He was a tough guy

MK: But was he fair tough or was he, you know--

RA: He was fair tough. He was fair tough. He was fair tough.

MK: And what did he look like? Do you remember him?

RA: He must have been about 5'10, dark fellow, big guy.

MK: Did he carry a gun?

RA: 2 guns.

MK: Did he use them?

RA: [Laughs] I never heard of him killing somebody. I heard of him shooting somebody but I never heard of him killing somebody,

MK: So okay, so Ben Turpin so are there any other black officers you can remember?

RA: There was one that lived on Chestnut between Joseph Campau and Chene but I can't recall his name. Everybody's heard of Ben Turpin.

MK: There are mixed opinions about Ben Turpin. Some people say he was a bad guy others say he was okay.

RA: He was okay. Maybe they were bad too [laughs].

MK: What about black doctors and dentists. Do you remember any black doctors or dentists in the neighborhood? Did you go to any?

RA: I went to Dr. Thomas. Dr. Thomas was on Chene, on Clinton between Chene and Joseph Campau. No, between Chene and Dubois. He was on Clinton.

MK: He was a doctor or dentist?

RA: Doctor. Dr. Martin was on--I think it was Beacon, between St. Antoine and Beaubien. I think that's what it was.

MK: What about Dr. Sweet, both Ossian, the doctor and the dentist? Do you remember those guys?

RA: Oh yeah, I remember hearing, reading about Dr. Sweet. Dr. Sweet moved on Charlevoix that was near--anyway he moved on Charlevoix where black people had never moved before and the white people came trying to get him out, you know, and he shot somebody and killed him. Dr. Sweet did.

MK: So it was a big deal back then?

RA: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

MK: Was that after the war or before the war?

RA: Before the war. Before the war. Before the war, uh-hmm.

MK: Before the war. You weren't in Detroit in '43 but I wondered your family in 1943 during the race riots you were in the service.

RA: I was home on furlough.

MK: You were? No kidding.

RA: [laughs] Yeah, I was home on furlough.

MK: So tell me about what you remember of the '43 riots.

RA: Okay, this is what I remember about the '43 riots. The soldiers would be driving by in weapon carriers and had guns stuck out the window, stuck out the weapon carrier. In case something happened. In other words, you were a prisoner in your own town. Couldn't go no place. And then the black people couldn't go on the other side of Woodward, on the west side of Woodward. Because if you did that's where the fight would start.

MK: Was there much fighting or conflict in, say, the Black Bottom, I mean, did anybody--

RA: Did anybody get killed?

MK: Yeah.

RA: I'm sure they did.

MK: Was it tense? Do you remember what it was like being there then?

RA: Well, in other words, all I can say is that it was scary. Like I said, I was on furlough and couldn't go noplac.

MK: Was there any violence right in the neighborhood that you saw?

RA: None that I saw.

MK: So, you were there for that whole week, then, the week of the riot, you were here at home all week?

RA: Yeah, I was here

MK: How did you understand it? What was it about? What were people saying? What was it about?

RA: well you heard several stories about a white guy taking a black baby and hitting him across the head and throwing him in the river. You heard several stories, so whether it's true or not you don't know.

MK: Was there much tchange after the riot. Did anything shift or anything? I mean, what was it like after?

RA: What was it like after?

MK: Yeah.

RA: Well, after that first week, it quieted down quite a bit. It quieted down and I was gone then.

MK: But when you came back from the service, there wasn't anything, it wasn't like the '67 riots, where people kept talking about it for years to come?

RA: No, that was really, that was really, that was really a bad one. Now I used to work on Twelfth Street and on Monday morning, I started on Beaubien and Twelfth and I couldn't get up to Clairmont it was so many businesses on that street.

MK: Did you marry?

RA: I got married in 1946.

MK: Oh, right after the service.

RA: My wife passed May 15, 1977.

MK: I'm sorry to hear that. How did you guys meet? What was her name?

RA: Her name was Almer, A-L-M-E-R.

MK: And her first name? What was her name?

RA: Oh, Almer Cameron, that was her name

MK: Cameron?

RA: Cameron, C-A-M-E-R-O-N

MK: How did you guys meet?

RA: Okay, she had a twin sister and the twin sister had started going around with my brother in law, well he wasn't my brother in law then, a friend of mine, and so he said he had somebody he wanted me to me. And so, I met her and so, in a year's time we got married and--

MK: Where did you get married?

RA: At her house. She was living on Harding.

MK: Did you have a minister or a justice of the peace? Was it a minister?

RA: Yeah. Her minister. Her minister, Meredith.

MK: What church did she belong to?:

RA: She belong to? Eastlake.

MK: And after you married what happened? Did you guys move out of your folks' house?

RA: Okay, I had been looking for a place, but you couldn't find no places to rent, so we stayed in my mother's house for a year. Then my brother James, he bought a house on Pingree and me and my younger brother rented the upstairs.

MK: So after you were married, you were living there?

RA: Yeah, we lived on Pingree about a year after we got married, we lived on Pingree

MK: And then how long were you there?

RA: From Pingree, about three years and then we bought a house on Martindale.

MK: There on the west side.

RA: Uh-hmm. There on Martindale.

MK: And do you have children?

RA: No, we never had no children.

MK: Did your wife live in the Black Bottom or was she, did you meet her somewhere else?

RA: No, she lived on Harding right off of Canfield.

MK: So a little further north. And, did she work?

RA: She worked at Carson Cafeteria and then she worked at—what do they call that, it's a restaurant down on Michigan, I forget the name of that place. And then when Lord and Taylor opened up, she went to work at Lord and Taylor, as a cook, out in Dearborn.

MK: What about Mr. Pearson, do you remember Mr. Pearson, Jesse Pearson?

RA: Jesse Pearson, yeah, uh-hmm.

MK: What kind of relationship did you guys have back when you were in high school?

RA: He was a really nice guy. I remember he was a real nice guy. We socialized if somebody would have a house party or something, you know, we would socialize together.

MK: Did you have much contact with him after you got back from the service?

RA: No, I haven't seen him too much. You know most of these guys in the service with me, they were from Detroit and Chicago. [INTERRUPTION]

MK: What about other people from Miller, did you maintain any contact with them?

RA: There a girl named Jane Williams, we go to the same church, she's still living. Now, Charles Diggs is dead, he graduated at the same time. There's a bunch of them. You know, when you live to be eighty there's a bunch of them, good people gone, you know.

MK: I know. What else do you remember about the neighborhood? Do you remember anything that kind of sticks in your mind about growing up and living in the McDougall and Antietam area?

RA: I'm going to tell you, really, it was pretty dog gone nice because we didn't know anything better. It's just like I say, it never was too much of a problem nowhere.

MK: Looking back on it now, and comparing it to what life is like for young people here in the city today, how would you compare that?

RA: Oh gosh. It's altogether different. I'd much rather come up the way I came up than come up the way these kids are coming up. It is, it's altogether different. I mean, you can't step on somebody's toe unless somebody wanna cut you or shoot you. It was so much nicer.

MK: Do you guys have any questions? Monique, anything?

MC: Can you talk a little bit about your father being an ice man?

RA: Oh, like I say, when the social worker, when we had to go on welfare, to the soup kitchen, he said okay, and then he got this idea. He lived on Antietam and there was a man that we bought ice from lived on Waterloo right off of Joseph Campau. And so daddy went down there to ask the man would he let him have a hundred pounds of ice—course he didn't have no money--and he got the hundred pounds of ice and he sold it for ten cents a block, it was twenty five pounds. And so that meant that he was hustling ice all day, you know.

MK: So he started out with a wagon?

RA: He started out with a wagon.

MK: Where did he get the wagon from?

RA: We had a wagon. It was like a tricycle, bicycle, too.

MK: How did that work when you sold ice? Did you go door to door or how was that?

RA: Well, when he started out he went door to door, then after a while he got customers, you know. Just like every other day or every two or three days, bring me twenty five pounds of ice, you know.

MK: I talked to another guy who sold ice, or his family sold ice, not him but the dad. He said they used to put these little cards in the window for how much ice they wanted. Did they do that too?

RA: I don't remember that now. He might be telling the truth now. That's a good idea though.

MK: Did he do it in the neighborhood, right where you lived on Antietam?

RA: As far as people called him, you know what I mean. He didn't mind walking then, you know what I'm talking about

MK: Did you guys have a telephone then?

RA: Not at that particular time. We got the first telephone around 1937, '36, '37. I can still remember the telephone number.

MK: What was it?

RA: [REDACTED] 0419.

MK: Did you keep the number when you moved to McDougall or not?

RA: Yes we did. Uh huh. I've had this number here since '56.

MK: So how long have you lived in this house?

RA: 33 years.

MK: A long time. Any other questions?

DK: When you were talking about the clubs that you would go to and you said there was some white people there, would there be tension?

RA: No.

DK: So it was all

RA: No, uh uh, no tension. Everything was so much nicer then than it is now.

MK: But you know you also had, you were talking about you wouldn't get served at the 5 and dime and you know, downtown and places, so as long as you stayed in your own area it was nice but--

RA: That's true. That's exactly right. Just like right now you pass by these high schools now there's so many cars in the parking lot. The students got cars, more cars than the teachers got. But at that time nobody had no car. You know what I mean. And you could go various places with a car that you can't go when you're walking.

MK: What was your first car?

RA: My first car was a '36 Ford.

MK: What color?

RA: It was black. And Joe Louis had a farm in I think Utica, Michigan. We used to go horseback riding up there on Sunday.

MK: Did you drive out there in your car?

RA: Umm hmm

MK: Who all would go?

RA: Oh, some of the kids from church.

MK: So was Joe Louis a big hero?

RA: Huh?

MK: Was Joe Louis a big hero?

RA: During that time? Oh, yeah. I mean, just like, if there was a fight were going on everybody on the whole block would have it on the radio. You didn't have to go home to hear it, you could walk down the street and hear it. Oh, yeah he was a big hero.

MK: Do you remember his baseball team?

RA: Yup it was called the Brown Bombers. They were good.

MK: Someone told me they use to play over there or practice on Duffield.

RA: They did. Yeah, they played on Duffield playground.

MK: Do you remember across the street from Duffield playground on the corner this was probably earlier then you were there, there was, I interviewed a guy whose family had a candy store there. He talked about Joe Louis coming in and buying cigarettes, but like one at a time. You know.

RA: I remember what you're talking about. They use to sell them one at a time. I know it. They use to come in a little metal box about that big.

MK: So you used to see the Brown Bombers, did you see them play ever?

RA: Oh yeah, I saw them play a lot of times.

MK: And was he out there then when they were playing or not?

RA: Sometimes, very seldom, but you know if he was in town naturally he'd stop by, you know. Every once in a while he'd come by.

MK: Do you have any photographs besides this one from that neighborhood or of yourself back then?

RA: I'm going to tell you I'm getting ready to move and packed up, most of my stuff is packed up.

MK: So they're all packed up.

RA: A lot of the stuff is packed up.

MK: Where you moving?

RA: I'm moving back in my first house on Martindale.

MK: Well what I'd like to do is ask you when you unpack if you come across any photos we'd like to come by and make copies of them.

RA: Okay

MK: You guys have any questions? Well thanks a lot this is great. I appreciate it. Can you tell me about Mr. Charles Diggs?

RA: I just said he was the most hated, one of the most hated fellows in the school.

MK: Why is that?

RA: Because he came to school in a limousine it be rain, snow, sleet and doing everything everybody else walks.

MK: So where did he live? Where was Mr. Diggs--

RA: At that time?

MK: Yeah.

RA: He lived on Maple and St. Aubin

MK: And he was driven over to Miller? It's not that far is it?

RA: No [laughs] it's not that far.

MK: Anybody else, did you find the guy that was a general?

RA: I think it's him.

MK: Let's see. So this is--It looks like

RA: I think so.

MK: So you heard about him being a general?

RA: See he passed. He was living in California and his obituary was written up in the paper here also and that's how I know he passed and it said he went from a private to a general.

MK: Wow. Anybody else off this list that you can sort of say some things about besides Mr. Diggs and his limo?