

Interview with Ms. Juanita Francis, her niece Akua, and Debra Taylor

Total runtime: 1:09:49

Video lasts for about 30 seconds before audio syncs up. [Two of the photos mentioned here are in the Dropbox folder for Ms. Francis.]

[[00:00:00]] - DEBRA: Girl...

AKUA: Okay.

DEBRA: A-- at least.

AKUA: A-- and then you think people that don't work for you, work for you.

DEBRA: You gonna ask the questions, you want me to ask 'em, or how you wanna do it?

EMILY: We can -- yeah we can just --

AKUA: You havin' a conversation?

DEBRA & EMILY: Yeah.

AKUA: Okay so, what do you want her -- are you lookin at her face, are you lookin' at the table, what are you doin'?

EMILY: I'm looking at the two of you, is that okay?

AKUA: Oh! Oh.

EMILY: Are you -- Do you wanna be on camera or no?

AKUA: I-- I was thinkin' she was the star, you know.

DEBRA: W-- well why can't you do it together? Yeah.

A: But we got different perspectives...

D: But that's okay.

D: Then it becomes a conversation, right?

A: Yeah, well--

D: Unless you want it separate?

A: No, I mean you -- You know what? My thing is so different... Okay I need to turn this down.

D: Yeah... I turnt mine down...

E: That's beautiful.

(Scuffling and adjustment sounds)

A: Um, what do we do if we need to break? Do you just want to-- ?

E: We can just pause it and -- That's okay. We can -- We'll edit it and stuff...

A: So, do we look alright? Let me say that. You know, I have to look alright for the camera. You know. I mean you know - when I'm talkin' about my aunt, you know I c'aint, I c'aint upstage her, y'all don't understand.

(Chuckling and clapping)

A: This lil' 4-foot-11 used to kick my behind, with a switch. Okay?

D: Uh, uh. Oh, I don't believe that. Not Ms. Francis.

(Laughter)

D & A *(At the same time)*: Hey, that's why you ended up -- No, 'cause she had to babysit--

D: That's why you ended up the way you--

A: That's why she had to babysit after me, 'cause everybody else was workin'.

D: See... Oh yeah, 'cause she had her own business, she had more flexibility in her schedule --

A: Not her-- her mother.

D: Okay, okay.

A: Her mother. You know, you know, so that's a whole different kind of story. So how do you wanna to start this?

E: Well let's start, um, let's start with just the very beginning. How did you-- ?

D: The name.

E: Well yeah, what's your name? Um, you know, uh, where did you live? When did your family come to Detroit?

MS. FRANCIS: Um, my name is Juanita Francis. I came to Detroit in 1945. My biological mother had passed when I was two years old, and before she died she -- my second mother, I call her-- They were like sisters but they actually were first cousins. And uh, she told her, when she died, she wanted her to raise me. And so uh, after she passed, it took a few years because my second mother husband was in the navy. And so, when he came out in '45 she told him she now wanted to get me. So that's how I came on the train, came to Detroit and lived with her.

E: And where were you before that?

[[00:03:00]] - MF: I lived in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. And I lived with my grandmother with... uh, uh, my aunt, who's two doors from her. She did the cooking for us because my grandmother

was -- well I guess she wasn't really able. And um, my aunt, sh-- she had money. And uh, she had a business. And I'm sure you -- the business back then was renting rooms because Black people didn't have no hotels. And she sold liquor, so that was her... way of making money. And she did well because uh, she-- she did that up until about -- let me see... I left there in '45... Uhhh, might've been in the late 40s or early 50s when I went back. She had -- my understanding and hearing what they were sayin' that she paid cash for her home that she had built.

E: Wow.

MF: 'Cause she was good with money. She was tight with it and she knew how to use it. 'Cause she used to tell me when she lived in Cleveland she used to pick up numbers -- you know? She was always a good provider, a hustler because that's what most of us had to do. So, after I come up here, um, my second mother, she wasn't working at the time, but she had work while her husband was in service. She told me she worked in the factory 'cause that's what a lot of womens was doin', I understand that that's how they help supported the family while the husbands was away. But in '48 -- well sh-- she went to beauty culture school -- so in '48 she graduated. And uh, she started workin' downtown Lafayette -- I mean at Adelaide and, uh, John R. and that's where she got her clientele. She built it up and as years passed she came and moved up on Brush and Kenilworth and she and her husband had a beauty and barbershop. He was a barber after he came out of service.

D: What was the name of the beauty shop?

MF: Lipscomb Beauty and Barber Shop. Mhm. I have a picture of it. Uh, where that picture of the b-- inside the barbershop? It was about 5 chairs in there.

(Pictures shuffling)

E: Oh, wow.

MF: The barbershop was in the front and the beauty shop was in the rear - in the back.

D: Barber and beauty.

E: So cool.

MF: Mhm. So I have pictures of the beauty shop-

A: Oh, and the shoeshine kit. I remember the shoeshine guy.

D: Hmm.

E: So, so- and it was L-I-P-S-C-O-

[[00:06:00]] - MF: C-O-M-B. Mhm, Lipscomb, mhm.

D: Lipscomb Beauty and Barber Shop.

MF: Mmm-hmm.

E: So, and how old were you when you moved here?

MF: I was 7 years old in 1945. Yeah.

E: And you moved to...

MF: Brush.

E: To Brush and Kenilworth area.

MF: Brush and Kenilworth, that's where she was living there. It was a four or five month flat. We was on the first floor.

D: So, when you moved here at 7 you were school age.

MF: Yes,

D: And so--

MF: And I went to Alger Elementary School.

D: What's the name of it again?

MF: Alger.

D & MF: Alger Elementary School.

A: It was on the corner of Kenilworth and, uh, Brush.

MF: Right. Walking distance.

D: And you made, uh, friends.

MF: Uh...

D: How-- how did that work out for a 7-year-old coming to a big city?

MF: I'm very shy, didn't talk--

D: Okay.

MF: But somehow there was one friend that, uh, I became friends with. Her name is Betty. Today we are still best friends.

D & E: Wow.

MF: And it's ironic, we dated together, we married two best friends... *(Chuckles)* And uh, we went through a lot together. Mhm. So like I said we're still best friends. We're still--

D: Wowww, lifelong friendship.

A: I call her Aunt Betty.

MF: Yes, yes.

E: That's amazing. Does she still live around here?

MF: This is her picture, right here.

A: Right-- right there.

D & E: Oh, woww.

A: And she's still around.

MF: Yes, she's on Nevada and, uh, Justine Street.

E: Okay.

MF: Nevada and Justine. Mhm yeah. And you would think-- I-- I used to, uh, tease her sometimes because I was a twin. But my twin died at 9 months. And she is just like my twin. It seem as if what happens to me happens to her. What happened to my children happened to her children. It's really ironic, we talk about it all the time because it is so unusual.

E: Wow.

MF: And it-- if one seem to hurt, she call and say, 'You know my back was hurting this morning.' and I say, 'You know mines was too.' (*Laughs*)

E: Oh my gosh.

MF: So, I don't--I don't know.

D: Maybe she's your spiritual twin.

MF: Yes.

D: That-that twin passed away at 9 months, God gave you a replacement--

MF: With her.

D: Uh, huh. That's what it sounds like.

MF: Yeah, and we've never had a fallin out.

E & D: Wowww.

D: That's amazing.

A: I told you she, Aunt Betty. I mean she's family -- I mean Aunt Betty will show up, okay?

MF: Mhm, yeah.

E: So, did Betty's family live around you guys?

MF: Um, her children live here and--

A: She talkin 'bout back then did--did Betty live around here?

MF: Oh, I was--well, back then...

[[00:09:00]] - MF: Well, let me think now 'cause-we didn't have no children at that age...

A: No.

MF: So, when we came up she lived on Burt Road when she started- She was havin' her baby-

D: Brightmoor area?

MF: Well, she- No, no she didn't. She was on the East side.

D: Okay.

A: She was further east.

MF: That's right. She was uh, on Fenelon and Nevada, that's where she was. Later on that's when she moved to Burt Road.

D: So what was school life like for a 7-year-old, uh, coming from Alabama? Uh, how-- W--what did you find-- How-- Who were the teachers? Uh, were the students interested in learning? How was the, uh, quality of the education from your perspective at that time?

MF: Uh, I think it was pretty good. And one thing that I always remembered and I liked, they used to have what they called once a year a Family, uh...

A: Oh, Family Fun Day.

MF: --Family Fun Night.

D: Yes.

MF: Well, the family and the children come and they had different games--

A: It was like a carnival.

MF: Yeah, it was really fun. And I always enjoyed that.

A: You know what else, I remember?

MF: What?

A: Well, I don't know if I really remember, but you and Betty went on to the Pinky Lee show or something? Didn't y'all go and do uh, uh, a Hawaiian dance or sumn?

D: *(Chuckles)*

A: Now Betty'll remember.

MF: Yeah, Betty might re-- remember.

D: So, what was the radio stations? Do you remember listening to the radio at that time? What were the stations?

MF: Uhhh...

D: Who were the deejays or what were the favorite songs then? Do you remember any of that? Or TV shows that people watched?

MF: Yeah, I remember when we finally got a television, I think it was about... '52. I believe it was around '52, and Howdy Doody and uh, oh what were some of the other shows... it was quite a few shows I used to watch.

A: Was Pinky Lee on there?

MF: I don't recall.

A: Okay.

MF: I don't recall.

A: Milky the Clown?

D: You remem-- ? Milky the Clown... *(Chuckles)*

MF: I don't recall Milky the Clown either.

A: Well, I know Hopalong Cassidy was on. *(Chuckles)*

MF: Yeah, that one was on, right--

A: Oh, I know, Amos and Andy? Or did they come on later?

MF: Yeah, it may have come on later--

A: They were on the radio.

MF: Yeah, they was on the radio.

D: Do you remember any of the hit songs back then? Or was Jackie Wilson really surfacing at that time since he was from Detroit? Or were there-- Are-- you know certain entertainers that were really popular, uh, like, during your--

MF: Well, yeah back in the '50s Jackie Wilson was hittin' it.

D: *(Laughs)* He was hittin' it.

MF: Yeah, uh huh. He was one of the people that was popular.

[[00:12:00]] - D: Who were some of the other artists that you remember- Entertainers that were popular?

MF: Uh... well you know, Smokey, came along 'cause he was -- 'scuse me I gotta get up. Gotta get up.

(There is a brief tangent conversation about MF getting up and getting a tissue until [[00:12:31]])

A: Yeah, you played the piano.

D: Is that you, right there?

MF: Yeah, uh, huh.

D: Oh, I didn't get in the way of the-- Is that you there?

MF: Yeah, yeah that is me.

D: Uh, huh. Now that's--

MF: That was a friend. There's my second mother.

D: Aww, she's pretty.

MF: Mhm.

A: Oh yeah they had the--

MF: Did you-- did you, were you familiar with her?

D: Who was that?

MF: Uh, Alberta Blackburn.

D: No.

A: Alberta used to be over, um... parks and recreation. She was like the second in command. One of the longest people that was... there.

D: Alberta--

A & MF: Blackburn.

D: Blackburn. Blackburn.

A: Yeah, she was a member of Greater New Mount Moriah Church.

D: That's her there too, is that? No that's a different lady... That's her uh, second mother there. She's pretty. She's the one that had the beauty shop.

MF: Mmm-hmm, mmm-hmm.

A: And then that's her too.

D: Now where's the one that came from down South? Oh, wow.

E: Woww.

D: This is her there also.

MF: Right.

D: People were so dignified back then, what happened? This is her also? She-- she was--

E: Oh, wow.

D: --Very pretty.

A: Auntie is this you? Look.

MF: Mhm, when I was a little bitty girl. (*Chuckles*)

E: Oh my gosh!

D: So you might want to pick a couple of pictures to take a picture of -- if she doesn't mind. To go behind whatever the interview is.

E: Yeah, that'd be awesome. Oh my gosh, oh look at you! You were little there.

MF: Yeah.

D: That would be nice.

MF: And see the backside was 5 years old.

D: Yup.

E: Oh my gosh. So that was when you were still in Alabama.

MF: Mhm.

D: Now, what was she getting, there? It says trophy--

E: (*Gasps*) Oh my gosh--

A: Listen doing hair. She doin' Vicky's hair.

D: Oh yeah, that would be good since we're talking about the barbershop.

E: That's awesome. That was in '67.

D: That would be a good-- I think 3 of those for sure.

A: That's-- that's the barber. That's the beauty.

E: So the barber was in the front, and the beauty was in the back.

A: Oh, yeah.

D: Sweetener Long Bridge, where is that?

MF: Uh, I'm trying to see--

A: See where?

MF: I think it was somewhere in Tennessee, and we was up in the mountains.

A: Oh that's later.

D: And uh, is that you?

MF: Mhm.

D: That's not you.

MF: Yeah, it don't look like it does it?

D: Uh-uh.

A: Let me see. Which one is it?

MF: I looked at it too and said it don't look like me, it's a ugly picture of me.

D: That's you too?

MF: Mhm.

A: Oh, that was in your drab moments. You was pregnant.

MF: I guess I was or somethin'.

A: *(Laughs)*

D: Now who is that?

MF: That's me too. Doesn't look like me either, do it? *(Laughs)*

[[00:15:00]] D: Oh, you got a little thicker there! And there her-- as a young-- a little girl, young woman, or maybe we pick between those two. And that one has the thing with the barber-- beauty shop. I can tell that's you.

MF: Mhm. Yeah, that's me.

D: That's you there.

MF: That's me and my daughter.

D: Where's the daughter?

MF: Next to me. And that's, uh, Ann.

D: Ann?

A: That's me.

D: What?

A: My maiden name is Elizabeth Ann.

D: Oh, then see we got to -- get that in. Wow! Those are my choices, but you're the-- you're the--

E: No, that's awesome.

D: I want to see these too, if that's okay.

A: Is that off? The camera's off right?

E: Yeah, the camera's off. Yeah, I can-- I can cut it back on--

D: So, now that's a good one to show. The barber and the beauty--

MF: --Look like I was tall don't it? Mhm. (*Chuckles*)

D: --Not really. (*Laughs*)

MF: Them long legs didn't make me look tall? (*Laughs*)

A: Look, imma pull this.

E: Omigosh

D: Innit that cute?

E: Aww...

A: Imma pull this and put yours in front.

D: Now, who are the people here?

MF: M'kay, this is my mother here.

D: Pretty.

MF: And... No, no that's not her. That's Velma. There -- there she is.

A: That's our cousin, right?

MF: Mhm.

D: And what's your mom's name?

MF: Juanita too.

D: Pretty. She reminds me of my mother's best friend Ms. Albessie. She was from somewhere down South.

A: Wasn't everybody?

D: Huh?

A: Wasn't everybody?

D: Yeah.

MF: Yeah, that was her too.

D: This was at the World's Fair wasn't it?

MF: Mhm.

D: I kinda remember. My parents took me in '67.

E: Is that in Montreal?

D: Uh, huh. Yeah, that was my first, like, big vacation.

MF: Oh, okay.

A: Imma hand you this, so you can put it up front.

E: Oh, cool.

D: Now, looks like some social...

MF: Yeah, you right. Social event. Playing Cards...

D: That-- Was that a favorite pastime?

MF: Oh, yeah.

A, MF, & D: Playin' cards.

D: You know, I know --

MF: Played a lot of Bid Whist...

D: Right, see we got to talk about the social part of the thing too--

EVERYONE: Yeah...

D: Now, w-- was she a beauty queen, or was she winning stuff, or doing hair?

MF: You know-- She--she won for hair. She was in so many clubs.

D: She's got so many--

A: She's an elitorian. You remem-- You know about them?

D: Elitorian?

MF: Sorority too.

A: E-- elitarians were the ones -- It's like a social club.

D: Like the homemakers?

MF: She was in the professional businesswomen club.

D: Okay, see that's what we wanna talk about. Social civic life is a... area.

MF: And Liberty Belles.

A: Yeah, let me see.

MF: They had hair shows, you know, the beauty.

A: And-- and the Association of Women's -- of Colored Women's Clubs.

D: Which one?

A: Right down there on Brush and, um, John R.

D: I-- I know the lady who has it up now. We 'sposed to be together.

A: Well, guess what?

D: This ones clear isn't it?

A: I had to put on my little Patent Leather shoes and my lil' socks with the lace and serve there.

E: Oh, wow.

(Giggles)

A: Okay. I-- I laugh when I hear these people tellin' these stories. I say, you ain't been down there.

D: I-- These are great. Yeah.

E: So cool.

D: Cool. So, we left off on...

[[00:18:00]] - D: ...What part, you know?

A: Um... Imma put these down.

D: We were talkin' about Howdy Doody and all that. So that, maybe then that's a good time to go in to what did people do socially in the '40s and '50s with evidently segregation still pretty strong?

MF: Mhm. Well... I was surrounded with, more or less, where they played cards.

D: Uh, huh.

MF: And that's the biggest thing that my family did. And, their group was playing -- they used to play for money, you know, Tonk. And uh, you know as things got better, then people started just playing for entertaining, like Bid Whist all the time. So... And, you know movies. I used to go to the movies, Alhambra Theater used to be over there on uh -- what was it Woodward?

A: Woodward and uh, Westminster. *(Westminster)

MF: Okay, yeah.

A: Between Westminster *(Westminster) and Kenilworth.

D: Al-What's the name of it?

A: Alahamer. *(Alhambra).

E: Alahamer. *(Alhambra)

A: Mhm. And then down on uh-- further down on North End, what was it-- Booker T.? The one that was down on the other side of Oakland.

MF: I don't know 'cuz we always went to Al-- Alahamer.

A: Yeah.

MF: And, back then too they had movies where they would have singing and the words would come where you could sing along with them.

(E & D laugh)

MF: Uh, huh. I used to enjoy that.

D: How much did it cost to get into the movie back then?

MF: I wish I could remember but I know it couldn't have been very much.

D: Uh huh.

A: I know when I was going it was like 20 cents -- 50 cent on the weekend and 20 cent during the week. Something like that.

D & E: Wow.

A: Okay, and I-- I remember that cuz you know, Rosetta and them let me go by myself to -- on Linwood. That's a little later. That's late 50s, early 60s.

MF: Uh, huh. And you know you usually have a-- um... a cartoon with Frank Sinatra. Yeah he used to be in the cartoon.

D: Mhm.

MF: And they would make Frank Sinatra-- you know he was slim back then, and they would make the-- he would be as slim as the microphone. I never forgot that.

(Collective laughter)

E: So where did you as a girl growing up in that neighborhood, where did you play? Like where were...?

MF: You know it was really just outside, uh, I had some skates-- that's how I kinda cracked my tooth. Out there trying to skate and fell...

E: Aww.

MF: But that's you know, that's mostly what we did or we visited the girl in the next building. You know--

D: What kind of games did you play when you were outside playing?

MF: Uh, more or less, I guess...

[[00:21:00]] - MF: ...Really I don't recall any games--

D: No hide-and-seek or...tag or... ?

A: That was my generation.

D: Okay, mine too.

MF: Yeah, no we didn't do--

D: Hopscotch, jacks...

MF: We used to play jacks, now. My mother matter of fact used to play jacks with me. We'd be in the house playing jacks. And I used to like that. Mhm.

A: But I was saying, you know what-- but you also played the piano.

MF: Yeah I-- I tried to play the piano. I took music lessons for a while.

D: Where did you perform-- Did you--

MF: Perform at home.

D: Okay, okay.

(Laughs)

A: The piano downstairs-- the same piano.

D: Oh wow!

MF: Yeah. So when my daughter got of age I, uh, gave her piano lessons thinking that "Oh I didn't do anything with it, maybe she would". She took music *(coughs)* excuse me, I guess a

couple of years... She didn't want it either. My son, he had drum lessons, he did it for a while and played with a band for a while, then he decided he didn't want to do it. My other one, he had guitar and he starts complaining it was hurting his fingers.

(MF and D laugh)

D: So we didn't get any musician out of the family.

MF: So I didn't get no musician out of there.

D: My mother tried to get a nurse out of our family and it came after she passed away, but she would've been so proud of my cousin.

MF: Yeah that's what my biologi-- I mean my second mother wanted to be a nurse. She went to school I think she said a year and she needed financial help, and there was no help.

D: So, if you had to think about what were-- what was the contact with people who lived in the Black Bottom-- Black people who lived in the Black Bottom in the North End with white people. What-- what was that interaction like? And when did it happen, how often...?

MF: Hmm.

D: Or, was it totally separate?

MF: I think it was separate.

A: It was kinda self-contained.

MF: Yeah.

A: Cuz anything that you needed, I mean I'd say the cleaners, we had restaurants, you know, uh--

D: What was the favorite restaurant?

A: Mr. Brent's. Cuz I'm think-- Mr. Brent's was down on Oakland.

MF: M'kay. Only thing I remember mostly on Oakland was the shopping-- we used to shop there for Bust-- I used to get the Buster Brown shoes. Red Goose shoes. *(laughs)*

A: Yes.

D: Red Goose? I've never heard of that.

MF: And they had a fish market over there and we used to buy fresh fish from over--

A: On the next block, on the Oakland, we had the open mar -- the Jewish open market. 'Member 'cause they used to have the-- the chickens hanging.

E: Oh wow.

A: 'Member down on Westmin -- nah -- it was on-- You-- You had to cross over the street and then you had that open market...

[[00:24:00]] - MF: It may be in the same area where the uh, fish market was.

A: Right. Right, right.

MF: Okay, right.

A: Right, you know. And then the uh -- but all up and down Oakland you had barbershops-- You had Black businesses. You had Black businesses, you had Jewish businesses.

D: So when was there time that you came into contact with white people, in the city?

MF: Hmm...When?

A: 'Cause-- 'cause they really--everything was either Black owned or--

MF: Well, there's some in -- you know -- school, but uh, I don't really... You know outside of shopping and dealing with business whites, that was about it.

D: And business whites would've been -- what? paying taxes or...

MF: Uh...

A: We had -- we had the whi-- the Jewish whites. Okay. Because Mr. Goldberg was on the corner.

MF: Right. He was white Jewish.

D: And who owned most of the housing? Were people own -- did people own their homes or did they rent? Who owned the homes?

MF: There were Blacks that uh, that owned the homes especially on Kenilworth because that's where homes were. We just happened to be, uh, in an apartment, and it was a huge apartment building across the alley from our building.

A: That's right.

MF: And it was one across the street, so that's most of where a lot of Blacks was renting from.

D: Okay.

MF: These was owned -- also by, you know, the Jews there.

D: Okay, so Jewish people owned a lot of the housing at that time but they rented out--

MF: Right. Especially in the apartments, but a lot of the homes I think were owned by Blacks.

A: Yeah. 'Cause-- 'cause around the corner I think--uh... Ihat(??) was one of the first ones to buy a house over there. On, uh, Owen and Oakland.

D: Uh huh. Yes.

A: Okay. And also professional Blacks uh-- Dr. Kramer(?) uh-- he was on, um, John R. and Owen I think. Dr. Kramer(?) is the one that went to jail for performing abortions.

D: Mhm, mhm.

A: You know, uh, um, but most of the people-- I'm talking about when I was growing up, that I did business with, that you don't know you doing business with-- I mean, they was Black folks. If you want to go to a restaur-- say, what's his name? Barbara Robinson's daddy. Was it Tim Robinson? Remember he had a restaurant-- ?

MF: Yeah he had a restaurant. I think it was on John R. wasn't it?

A: Right. On John R., you know. So, I mean we-- to me, I would say, we were very self-contained.

D: Mhm.

A: You know.

D: So, what-- when--

MF: But you know, I didn't know anything really that much--it was more or less hearsay on Hasting. A-- and when I'm lookin at it, seems like that was mostly below the Boulevard, wouldn't you say? And we were, uh, quite a distance--

[[00:27:00]] - A: You were North-North of the boulevard.

MF: North of, you know. So--

D: So there seemed to be a connection between people who might've been relocated from Black Bottom to the North End. That's what I heard you say earlier. So, around what time did that happen, um, and what was people's reaction? How did they know that they had to move?

A: (*Laughs*) Well they started tearing down the -- I mean you know that's before my time, but when my mother and them talk about it, you know, they was tearin' down stuff.

D: With no notification?

A: Notification? Well somebody said, you know, "You're going to have to move," probably, but I mean it's not like today where they had to, you know. You don't want people-- when the bulldozers coming down the street you know you got to-- make some moves. You know. I don't think that people was like, they didn't send out the notices to you, they sent out the notice to the property owners.

D: Mhm.

E: Right.

D: So-- so people may have gotten "adequate notice," quote unquote, or they may not have.

A: Depends on who you talk to.

D: And the people who owned their homes, were you friends with any of those people in the Black Bottom, uh, that owned their homes and then had to relocate? Just wondering how they were, uh, dealt with by the city. And that might be a question that we have to figure it out in future-- future interviews.

A: Somebody older too.

MF: See, where we were it wasn't considered Black Bottom. So, like I said I knew people who had their own home because I played with the children. You know, it was the same age kids--

D: Right, right. But the children weren't in grown folks' business back then. *(Laughs)*

MF: Right, so we didn't know anything about, you know, all that.

A: And I think also in the area, you had like Dr. Wright -- I'm talking about the doctors-- Our teachers and doctors and folks, they lived on the block. You know they lived in the neighborhood.

D: So what do you think the effect of uh, it sounds like in some ways, it was the best of times maybe, and the worst of times, but what would you say the effect of urban renewal relocation had on Black business and the intact community that provided, like, uh, a spectrum of services and products and goods?

A: Because the beauty shops stayed there until when? 'Cause you had moved here.

MF: It stayed there -- Sherman died in '62...

D: Who's Sherman?

A: My aunt's husband.

D: Okay.

A: Her mother's husband.

D: Okay.

MF: And...

[[00:30:00]] - MF: I want to say...

A: '66? 'Cause wa-- Wasn't the shop still there when the riots happened?

MF: One of them said '66, so-- so it had to be after... after that. Around '66 or '67 was when she brought it home. Because people start -- at that time -- someone twice had broken into the shop.

D: Okay, okay.

MF: And she wanted to bring it home.

D: Uh, huh.

MF: So we had a strong block club and she asked what did they think about it, and they told her they didn't have a problem with it as long as it wasn't advertised. So she brought her shop home and it was in the basement.

D & E: Oh wow.

A: Yeah. I mean it's still-- the space is still there.

MF: Yeah it's-- I made a walk-in closet out of it.

(Collective laughter)

A: Well, but what I would say though, was at that time this block was Blacks and Jews.

MF: Yeah.

A: Jewish...

E: And that was in -- at the time when you were-- when you had the beauty shop over in the North End--

MF: Yeah, I was still over there. Right, uh huh.

A: Yeah so it was Blacks that moved-- When--When they moved over here it was Jewish and it was -- and Jewish is a religion, I understand that, okay, but Jewish whites. Okay, and Black people. And generally it was Black people -- Black -- what we would call "middle class", what we would call middle class folks, 'cause you know if people's-- if you could buy a house -- a brick house over here, okay you were saying something. And like I said my other aunt -- these are my great aunt-- *she's* my aunt but the great aunts and uncles that came up before her who was what she came up here to. Um, they had a house on Pingree and Linwood. Their mama's folks, they was on Linwood and Fenkell. My aunt Hattie's the only one that stayed in the neighborhood for 60 years on, uh, Owen and Oakland. You know...

D: Did you um, did people lock their doors, uh, during that time? Uh, did you feel safe? Was there a lot of violence in the Black community?

MF: No.

D: Then, what-- what did that look like? What did that picture look like?

MF: People got, uh - it was the neighborhood was nice, the people were nice and people looked out for each other. And there was no violence. And it was a lot of professional people in here, we had a couple next door who was a teacher. And, uh, matter of fact there was uh, working people -- I think her husband though worked in the plant. And--

A: Was it post office?

MF: Yeah, the post office. And uh, people just got along.

D: So if you were to look at what is happening today in Detroit...

[[00:33:00]] - D: ...Or what has happened in the last few decades and compare and contrast it to that era and time, what would you say are the major contributing factors to what we find ourselves in today, in terms of safety, violence...?

MF: Well it's definitely not safe as it used to be, 'cause it's not safe anywhere really.

D: Right.

MF: But, uh, you see the difference -- I -- We're seeing the difference because we just split up the money and the block club because the people coming up now, nobody wants to be involved in anything. And uh, people just, I don't know -- because we have a doctor that lives across the street-- she's been there, she grew up with my children and she's a little older than my children she's sixty -- I think Bernice is sixty-one. Her sister's a teacher, she lives over there -- They lived there as my children was growing up and, uh, they never left. And uh, we have another retired teacher down the street who never left. You know, these are people who've been here for umpteen years. And the neighborhood is not the way it used to be, of course.

D: What do you think that, um, do you -- have you thought about what... why that might be?

MF: I think people don't care like they used to. And now, people -- we have a couple people that moved into the neighborhood in the block and you don't even know how to approach them because people are so angry now that they don't want to hear criticism, even if you know how to talk to them, you know? And then, I see the neighborhood needs to -- gets better 'cause next door to me really -- it's a young lady with two small children and she let them come out and play, but when kids get to playing you're supposed to teach them. You bring your toys, you bring you pick-up, and you come back. But see they leave them out, if they're eating chips they leave the bag, you know, and it's like they don't care as much about where they live like they did in the day. And that's not--

D: Yeah it's--some-- I'm wondering if some of that might be the result of uh, home training and-- and decades of children raising children...

MF: Could be.

D: Teenage pregnancy.

[[00:36:00]] - D: Uh... and um people living in uh, survival mode and not seeing that as a high priority. Where-- you know--

A: I-- I would say that, but I would also say that the difference is-- I mean, when I was a little kid, you know, I'd come over here. I would walk over to my other aunt's house on Pingree and

Linwood, I mean I might be what? Eight, nine years old, and folks just be checkin you know, “When you get there call back,” you know. Um, so I think that’s part of -- but I also think that you didn’t have a whole lot of time be doing a lot of stuff because everybody was working. Now unemployment is just out the box, okay? So you don’t have time to, you know, I would be over here probably ‘cause my mother was working or uh, my-- my father is her brother okay? So -- *(phone begins ringing in the background)* -- you know it’s--it’s different, you know? Whereas before--the other thing I would say is that -- *(phone stops ringing and Ms. Francis picks up)* - you used to could like go to the playground, that actually had swings and activities and monkey bars and all that kind of stuff. Well, folks’ll act like now when they have that, that they’ve done you a special favor instead of the fact that that should be in a community.

E: Right.

A: You know? So I think that um, I-- I would-- I would say yes being young, but you know I had kids young. You know I was seventeen the first time I thought I got married. *(chuckles)* You know. Had four kids by the time I was twenty-two. But I had to be accountable *(chuckles)* even with that situation. So I think that also if you’ve never lived that way, you know, if you’ve never had a-- a nice house, okay, and you’ve never been taught that you gotta keep it up. You gotta do the grass and all those things, ‘cause I think that’s a part of it too. You know, ignorance is not bliss. You know?

MF: Yeah, and my mother was very proud about keeping things nice. I-- I-- I grew up--

D: Yes. Well I can tell by your place. You know, and-- I mean, that’s so important. Our parents really are our first teachers.

MF: Mhm.

A: And you could--

D: And-- and not just educationally but, you know, socially, culturally-just about life. Life’s lessons and how to survive.

A: But wouldn’t you say-- So this would be fourth-generation now that you’re here? I’m saying that Uncle Bob and them first, Auntie and them first, then you, then you’re children, now you got grandchildren. So that’s four generations that we’ve been -- and great-grandchildren, I’m sorry, excuse me-- that’s just been born.

D: Five.

MF: Four great-grands.

A: So, that come here-and we come here Christmas, errbody, okay? Matter of fact, we make-- I made an announcement last year ‘cause it was so many folks I said, ‘Let me explain something, everybody in this house is blood kin.’

[[00:39:00]] - A: 'Cause, you know, we got a lot of young people now.

D: Uh, huh. Uh, huh.

A: --You know? In they twenties and what have you. So, um -- But I also think that it's different when you have a legacy. Because I would say that we-- we have a legacy. You know, there was an expectation of certain things, you know? And even at-- at-- Like me with having kids very young and what have you, I still had a family.

D: You had family support.

A: Oh, no question.

D: Everybody doesn't have that.

A: No, that's what I'm saying. That's exactly what I am saying, you're on your own. And the same people even tell you "Well you made your bed hard, lay in it." Mine, I can honestly say, lifted me up, you know? You know, I still--

D: Makes all the difference.

A: No it does. I mean, but you also had a community. You know, when you talked about the block clubs and what have you. I mean--

D: And you had neighborhood schools. Do you still have a neighborhood school?

MF: Mhm.

D: I mean-- yeah. For-- but-- for elementary, middle school, and high school?

MF: They have um--

A: What's it now-- I-- I forgotten 'cause you we--

MF: Central's still over there.

A: Yeah, Central's there but see--

MF: And then um, uh...

D: Durfee. Which is getting ready to -- that's-- that's teetering-- that's teetering right now, yeah. So the whole landscape, in terms of social economics, terms of education is changed, in terms of school system, uh, poverty rate officially is somewhere around 40% in Detroit. Unemployment is through the roof, the official unemployment rates I don't think really reflect the actual because what it shows is those who are seeking work and not finding it and there's a whole group of people that aren't seeking 'cause they just haven't been able to land anything, that makes it a lot higher. Um--

A: And I also think that the story, you know like what-- what you doing in terms of documenting? For some people that may seem like it's not really relevant, but it *is* relevant to us,

okay? I don't think that um, when they're downtown making these decisions and what have you, you know, I was fortunate enough to be director of neighborhood city halls for-- under the Mayor Archers, okay? So I -- but before that, we had -- we had neighborhoods and each neighborhood had a particular designee. Uh, you know about it when you were over there with um -- oh God what's her name? You know who I'm talking about.

D: Judy Jackson? Franklin Wright? Settlements?

A: Not just Franklin Wright, I'm saying that uh-- Fire East--

D: Joanne Watson?

A: No-- that you were-- w-- with Angela. You worked with uh-- on the East side.

D: Yeah with Franklin Wright Settlements, I was with Franklin Wright Settlements.

A: Okay, so what I'm saying is this. I can kind of track, because I was involved, with the neighborhoods that had a-- a block club, or an umbrella organization.

[[00:42:00]] - A: Okay? When they dismantled that, when the-- the beginning of the dismantlement.

D: When did -- when would you say that what frame-time frame was that at, um... when they dismantled the neighborhood? Uh--

A: When they started? Well I -- see Imma tell you-- Imma take you way back-- I really think with the freeways started it, okay? When they started dismantling the freeways, okay? Because then you've got to relocate people and-- and the guidelines, not the guidelines, the law said there were certain areas that-- that Black people couldn't move to. Or-- or-- or if they were building houses that--

D: You didn't qualify for FHA to even get the financing--

A: And they told the folks that were building houses that if they sold to us, this is from the federal level, you know? A lot of this I learned because when I was with uh-- uh, you know Truth and Reconciliation, you know bought a lot of that. So, when you--

D: Yeah the federal policies help to discriminate and systematic racism is-- yes.

A: That's what I'm talking about. So it didn't just, like, pop up and you want to just bring-- blame Duggan or somebody, okay? That's not-- That's not what happened. This is years-- this is pre-insurrection, pre-'67 -- the dismantling of the neighborhoods. What they did was after '67 is not rebuild, which further contributed to it. You know?

D: Mhm.

A: And in the communities where you had a voice--

D: Disinvestment.

A: Yes, yes.

D: And redlining.

A: Yes, yes.

MF: Mhm. Still redlining.

A: Yes, still redlining. If you find out how much they paid for insurance here, okay? You know-- I-- I live on Northlawn and Seven Mile area. If I lived north of Seven Mile, I would paying less car insurance and house.

E: I bet.

A: Okay?

D: Yeah, I know what I pay.

A: Okay. So I'm just saying, well it's gon' come-- yours gon' come down though. Because you're down-- downtown area. But um, here -- so I think that when people begin to bail out -- bail out that is move across 8 Mile, so what would you say? That's post insurrection, post '60s, okay? Now, what's interesting to us is, people are now buying these houses and moving back in the community.

D: Right.

E: Mhm.

A: You know? 'Cause you said you don't live that far.

E: Right, yeah. I live over on uh-- on uh, [redacted].

A: Okay? So I'm saying-- so now there is a reinvestment, but it's not us because we don't have jobs to be able to get the properties.

D: Yeah, the-- the basically, uh, over I would say at least the last ten years, the most stable uh employment and the largest employers have been the medical field, DMC, had been the city of Detroit, and then of course the factories and all of that has been gutted.

A: Decimated.

D: Pretty much been-been gutted. And so the-and then this last move with the bankruptcy took out the pensioners.

[[00:45:00]] - D: And especially the Black pensioners that retired between 2003 and 2013 who took a extra hit--

A: That's right.

D: --in the clawback. And so, basically what they did was, uh, starved out and pooled all the, uh, sustainable income from folks who had stable jobs and then those were mainly the older people

who would be baby boomers and older, and then trying to wait for people to die out is what it seems like the strategy is to me.

A: Well, and also let's say there's -- and throwing them even deeper into poverty but cutting their health insurance and their health benefits, okay?

D: Exactly. \$150 a month does not re-- if the time in your life when you really need your medical benefits, now you're gonna tell me to go to Affordable Healthcare when now we've got a president 45 who is trying to decimate that and then these people at this phase of life who've -- their social contract has been broken.

A: Well, the advantage she has though is she worked for the feds (*chuckles*) so, she retired from-- from the federal government.

D: What-- what was your position? What-- what department did you work for with the federal government?

MF: I was in uh-- statistical uh--

A: You couldn't have forgotten.

D: You were all statistics?

MF: But, see I was with Internal Revenue, but we were in the McNamara building. That's the old-- different.

A: It's where--what you call now isn't it? Where the-- where the--

MF: Where, on the corner above John Lodge and, uh, Michigan Avenue, the new building? It--

D: Uh huh, yes. I just went down there for business. (*chuckles*)

MF: Yeah. In '93 that's when we went there, and I was there two years before I retired.

D: Okay? From the IRS.

MF: Mhm. But see we didn't deal with individual income tax, that was in the McNamara building, mhm.

A: But I would say too that, uh, what was too about our family was-- not only they were in the factories but they were entrepreneurs and you know -- hustlers we know but-- but-- but they were independent entrepreneurs.

D: And let me-- let me, can we just talk a little bit about that from a generic perspective? 'Cause my family, uh, were innovative entrepreneurs as well. Uh, it's that my dad always used to say that necessity is the mother of invention. And so, what were the conditions that caused people to feel as though they had to create their own way of survival. Was it because of discrimination in the job market? Were there, uh, other kind of barriers or, people who were just seeking another

level of freedom to be able to have their own income without-- and the flexibility of their lifestyle?

A: But-- Well I would--

[[00:48:00]] - A: Well see, it's a little bit different I would say for our family because they either were in the plant or with my aunts and my great-aunts -- I mean, my great-uncle he was working at Uniroyal but his wife was a nurse. Okay? Uh, she worked IRS. Uh, my stepmother worked for Michigan Bell. You know my Daddy might've been in a plant, but then he had uh, janitorial service at night. Um, okay, Uncle Bob had the-- the cleaners that he was working with. So I--

D: To me it sounds like a determination to succeed and to not only to survive, but to succeed and a-- another thing that comes to mind to me is, you're talking about married couples and it seems like maybe there were more intact--

A: Families.

D: --husband and wives, and now we have a lot more single mothers raising children alone. And so when you have two incomes and all your chick-- all your eggs aren't in one basket, if one had a business and the other had a stable job as a nurse or whatever, then if one thing went down, you would -- your whole ship didn't come down.

MF: Right.

A: Well-- well, and I also think that if-- You know if somebody goes down because the family group is intact -- like with me. You know getting married very young and divorcing very early, but it nev-- the thought never occurred in my mind that somebody wasn't gon' lift me up, whether it was my father or her or somebody because it was a f-- see it wasn't my problem it was a family problem--

D: It was extended-- extended family. Family had a different level of meaning, uh, and connection-- I know my dad always talked about the extended family. My grandmother would cook -- it would ways be enough for everybody who came over-- it-- just happened to drop by. It was like, you could always make enough for the next person.

A: People knew Sunday dinner, okay? Okay--

MF: Oh yeah. Those were the dinners.

D: What-what-now what would be a ideal Sunday uh, Sunday dinner?

A: Oh, please.

MF: Ohhh. My mother loved -- and even when she died in '82, before she got down, she loved making rolls.

A: Oh, yeah. Homemade, butter rolls!

MF: She used to make them homemade yeast rolls that would ri--

D: You have that recipe?

MF: I have seen it and I said "I guess she left it for me because I didn't know how to--"

A: But see, if you give to me I'll cook it. But you know I'll cook it, 'cause I'm a scratch cooker.

D: And then I want a sample.

(D & MF laugh heartily)

MF: And you know back-- back then too, I remember we used to go on picnics out to Belle Isle.

D: Uh huh.

MF: We had the rolls then, you know you had the fried chicken, you had the deviled eggs.

A: And m-- my mother used to spend the night out there.

MF: You had all this kind of stuff. And you know, I got hooked on-- Well I loved fried chicken and deviled eggs because when you use-- when we used to travel by car, going South -- well, we couldn't go to the white people. So we would take lunches, and that was always our lunch.

[[00:51:00]] - MF: Fried chicken and deviled eggs and cheese and pound cake. Those were-- The meal and I tell you those were good foods back then.

D: So, did most people tend to go back and forth between uh--

(MF picks up the phone and speaks to the person on the line. A gets the phone and also begins to speak to the person on the phone -- it's Ms. Betty!)

D: Uh, did most of the um, in the '40s and the '50s, did you find that the uh, most of the families who came from the South would tend to go back on a regular basis to visit what-- And did they call it home still even though they were living here in Detroit? Still call it home down South?

MF: Mhm. And we used to go back during the summer-- Matter of fact, that was my vacation every summer. I would catch the train and I was too young so they had, uh, what they call it?

D: Those little usher people, the chaperones that my sister was telling me that's what my brother and she had.

MF: Mhm. They would take care of you when you was travelling, I used to go by bus sometimes I used to go by train--

A: Yeah, 'cause-- 'cause Uncle Phil was a pullman.

MF: Yeah, but he was on Canadian line, he wasn't--

D: My sister had a name for it too--I can't remember--

MF: Yeah, it's a name for it.

A: Yeah. And see I went too, I'm the next generation -- I went down to my mother's in, uh, Georgia.

D: What part of Georgia?

A: LaGrange, Georgia. Sixty miles outside Atlanta.

D: Okay.

A: Every summer, okay?

D: Did you enjoy it?

A: Well that's when I realized there was a difference. Living in Detroit, I-- I truly-- I didn't know there was a difference except for one time we went downtown to eat -- I mean went downtown shopping and I was in Kresge's and they said we couldn't sit down at the counter to eat the hot dogs. That was the first time that I knew that something fu-- shaky okay? And-- And my mother said, "Well I'm not buying it." Okay? And then -- but when I went down South was when I really realized tha-- in my mother's lil' small community there -- that there was a difference, okay? And my first experience was -- I was five years old but I could read and write, you know? According to them I was real smart, okay, on that level, okay? But, I went in there -- you know it said "Colored" and "White". The "Colored" fountain was nasty, okay? The "white" fountain was clean. So I went to the "white" fountain and drank. And I got pulled. And so my mother's sister that was down there -- she said you know the-- the clerk that came she said "You not supposed to be doin' that..." blah blah blah. And I said "I'm gon' drink out the nasty fountain", you know I was a lil' spitfire, and my aunt was trying to explain to her that I was not from here--

D: They said, "Let's send this girl back up north real quick before she get all of us strung up!"
(Laughs)

A: N-- no later on they sent me back, okay?

[[00:54:00]] - A: But then the girl-- the girl looked like somebody be my babysitter, okay? And so my-- here's my aunt explaining to her that I didn't know what that was and what-have-you. And that was the first time that I remember seeing a-- a grownup being treated differently and what have you, because I didn't face any of that here.

D: Yeah, you were insulated by your family and the community.

A: Yeah and everything that we needed, you know, you had. And even when my dad -- but I was a little bit older then, I was about nine or ten years old--they used to shop up on the Boulevard, you know there was a Saks Fifth Avenue up there. And so my aunt, my great-aunt, uh they w-- there was a Saks Fifth Avenue up there and it's-- actually, the building's called Saks Fifth

Avenue. Uh, not the-- not the New Center building, the one behind it. There was a Saks Fifth Avenue, there was Crowley's in the New Center building--

D: I remember that. And there was uh--

A: The next block there was a Dunby-- yeah I think it was-- Demorys(?). That's upscale shopping, okay? That's like Neiman Marcus to folks.

E: Yeah, okay.

A: And uh, so from-from the family standpoint I really think that I grew up very insulated. Even though I got married very young, but I was--

D: You're a baby boomer. And your aunt--

A: What are you 79?

MF: Mhm.

A: She'll be 80, January 17th 2018.

D: She's in the silent generation that's what they call that generation that followed the World War -- it was in between -- after World War II and during McCarthyism that they came into development that-that uh, inquisitions of McCarthyism uh, caused that generation, this is kind of the theory, to kind of want to just raise their families, follow the law, not get in trouble, and be secure.

(MF starts chuckling.)

A: And that's my aunt-that's my great-uncles and aunts. That's her mom and them.

D: Because of the environment that they had created after World War II.

MF: Mhm.

A: But I also think, you know you asked a question earlier about socially-- They had their own clubs. We got, you know--

E: Yeah, what were-- do you want to talk a little bit about that like what were the social organizations and-- ?

A: Well-- Well let me back up. Let me talk first about-- 'cause auntie wasn't a member but some other folks were members-- Uncle Phil and all them were members of um, you know what I'm thinkin'. The um... What's the guys? The pledge not-- not you just-- not just fraternities, but the Prince Hall Mason.

D: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

A: They were Masons.

D: Elks, Masons, Easter Star--

A: Right, right. So they had that for--

MF: That was up on Dexter too, the Masons.

A: Masons was right up here on Dexter and Boston, okay? So a part of my family -- that was part of what they did.

D: Yeah, my brother's part of--

A: And then, they had their social club-- like she was talking 'bout her mom.

[[00:57:00]] - A: The-- the elector-- the electori-- I can't remember the name. But they was you know, the folks to be in the Chronicle-- Sorry 'bout that.

D: Was that a part of uh, Dorothy Height's, was that an extension of her organization? Do you know?

A: No.

D: No? Okay.

A: No. If you went into the Black community-- if you went to Cleveland, if you went-- Detroit. Any of the major cities where you had Black population, they had their ladies' clubs and stuff--

D: Mhm. But I thought they were an extension-- she had something--

A: No she had-- Dorothy Height was the Association of Colored Women's Clubs, right?

D: Yeah.

A: Right. But that-- that's where you got downtown-- the Colored Women's Club, okay? That they changed to... Women's Club, okay? Which we gon' change back to Colored Women's Club. But anyw--

D: 'Cause now, that's right on Brush, uh so that--

A: But that -- but that was an area where-we got pictures of it matter of fact. I just-- well, you'll see that this afternoon, okay? Uh, wh-- Blacks, kind of like middle class, 'cause you all were considered middle class. I mean, you lived well, okay? I mean this is a three-bedroom house, upstairs too, you know? That you all owned, and I don't know about a hungry day. You know? And when birthdays and all of that... So the quality of life for that group that you're talking about uh, to me was well -- if you decided you wanted to go to college or somethin'...

D: I-- I-- I know the world has changed a lot and I think what I know from my own childhood and my parents being, uh, Depression babies, uh, a little older than you, is that that generation is called the "greatest generation".

A: The one before?

D: Uh-huh. The greatest generation that lived-- ever lived because they--

A: Uncle Bob and them 'cause they was in the war.

D: Yes. Not only 'cause they fought fascism, they built the middle class, they had the value system that put family before everything, they were good providers, and they added value. They actually created the middle class uh, and-- and did what was necessary-- I think the work ethic was even different.

A: Oh-- no-- without question.

D: Yeah, because even people who were quote-unquote "economically deprived or poor," we'll sweep their dirt. You know, I mean people took pride in where they lived for the most part and-- and I think spiritually, you know--

A: They went to church too. Back then. They went to church.

D: Yes. That spiritually it was like that thing of cleanliness being next to Godliness. There was some certain basic values--

A: I would agree.

D: That were predominant in the Black community. That's not to say there weren't people who were outside of that because you always have that but I think a core group of our people...

[[01:00:00]] - D: Embraced... upward mobility. Uh, worked to make sure the men then-- Well, first of all there were couples, married people, and the men say their roles as providers, very seriously, even if they were players. You know, or did-did whatever they did--

A: Even if they had two families.

D: Right! But they saw that was a strong value system and so then the sacrifices were made -- you know, to make sure that those-- And there was a eagerness to do better, themselves--

A: To strive for more. It wasn't taken for granted. That would be that.

D: And, they really did want their children to do better than they did so even if they didn't have quote-unquote "formal education", they valued education.

A: I think, I want to make a suggestion, I think you need to come back, okay? When you get your format, and what have you and do another interview. 'Cause I think we're fleshing things out, you know? And I know she's gon' be open on it, 'cause she can't tell me no.

(MF and D laugh)

A: I'm her baby, I'm her first baby.

D: Yeah, and we're-- and we're I think we're gon' have to-- you want to pause it for a minute?

E: Sure! Yeah.

D: We need to get-- [audio cuts off]

END

PART 2

[[0:00:00]] - A: Okay, this family... I think I was fortunate because in my family on -- in terms of my dad's family... they worked for themselves. I don't -- I c'aint think of anybody that worked for white folks. I mean other than factories I'm talkin' 'bout.

D: Mhm.

A: Mmm. Mm-mmm. So, I -- so I got a different perspective. My mother's side of the family -- it was a different one.

D: Were there still domestics?

A: Oh yeah--

D: In Detroit at that time? Was that, uh, a profession that a lot of women--

A: Was not a profession, it's what you did.

D: Well, I mean, yeah. Was it a field that a lot of -- would like -- if you had to guess 20% of the women that you knew that were working.

A: That came up from the South.

D: Worked uh, domestic or--

MF: I didn't know any.

D: You didn't know any?

MF: I didn't know any.

A: We had people workin' for us.

D: Okay.

A: Ma 'n them had domestics cleanin' they house.

D: Okay.

A: I mean seriously.

D: Okay.

A: You know. Every I--

D: Okay.

A: Rosetta, Auntie, who else? I'm tryna think, was it Rob? They had people here a-- and matter fact -- I will say this -- you know, Jewish people used to be amazed 'cause I never will forget -- a woman hassled my mother about -- look-- She was lookin' for somebody to clean and my mother said, "So am I."

D: Mhm, yeah.

A: So it was a--

D: Yeah. It-- it put her on the same level--

MF: Level.

D: With this person and they weren't -- in their own minds, view --

A: She was I--

D: See her in that light.

A: That was her attitude. Her attitude was "well let me ask this Black woman." You know, we were downtown shoppin', okay? And she asked -- she -- Look, my mo-- my mother wanted to whoop her behind, okay? She was mad. *(Laughs)* My mother said "I left the South 'cause I wasn't gon' do domestic work."

D: Well--

A: Well, her older sister did. She just switched and was workin' at a hotel.

D: Uh, huh.

A: Okay?

D: Yeah because, you know, when you enter the stage at the age of, uh, accountability or adulthood, it's important in terms of what opportunities -- what filter you see life through, and then what opportunities were available to you. Like the opportunities like you and I had are different from the opportunities that your aunt had.

A: Exactly.

D: And now we see--

A: And what they created. Let me back up. What I have to say is the opportunities they created for me. Because technically, you know, a 17-year-old with a bunch of babies.

D: Oh, we all stepped up on somebody's back--

A: O-- okay -- would not -- I woulda been down -- when they told me somethin' about go down to the welfare office I went down there in a rabbit coat and some shoes and stuff, you know. And my daddy was mad as hell. He was mad at my aunt for tellin' me to go, okay? "She don't have to go to no welfare, okay? We don't do welfare!" I mean he was really upset. And then

when I needed a place to stay and stuff - whether I went and stayed with her or somebody else -- I'm talkin' about when I separated -- I never fell through the hole.

D: That family support system--

[[00:03:00]] - A: Right.

D: That uh, buoys these people from the pitfalls of life.

A: That's true.

D: Yeah.

A: That's exactly true, but did--

D: We did that for people in our family and it was done, you know.

A: Wait a minute, who in my -- wait a minute, me. W-- when I was -- when I needed a house and stuff, I remember when her mother came out to see the house I was 'gon buy her, my stepmother, and some other folks. Came out -- and Auntie said, "Okay this is nice. Okay, y-you, yeah you can move in here." Okay? You know, it was kinda like my step--

D: Yeah, you get the stamp of approval.

A: My stepmother say -- they were movin' I-- I had separated, right? They were movin' out of town, my father and them were movin' to Florida. And so, first Auntie -- her mother came, okay? Looked at the house and what have you, said it's cute, okay? (*Laughs*) Then -- but my stepmother was the one that said, "Uh, uh. We can't leave you up here. Rick will have a fit." Rick is my dad. "If we leave you up here with them four kids tryna hustle --" ... Because they used to have signs there that say, 'No pets, no children' ...On houses. When you look for a place to live.

D: Mhm.

A: So, I had four. So -- but everybody aided wasn't in that situation.

D: Right.

A: And I recognized that, you know. Or had a family that was gon' be supportive. Or when I wanted to go back to school -- have somebody to babysit. And that's, to me, what you said about this young lady next door-- They fall through the pitfall.

D: Mhm.

A: Okay? In terms of support--

D: It does take a village.

A: Yeah. No, that's real. That is exactly -- if I said any problem, that would be would I say our problem is now.

D: That's our village. We gotta re-create it.

MF: Right.

A: You gotta bring it back.

D: And -- yes.

A: And what happens is - like with me and my husband. Now, we got total 7 kids -- 7 adult children, okay? They all workin' and doin' whatever they doin'. But ain't nobody got a problem with sendin' they brothers and sisters, or friends to my house durin' a certain period when they were teenagers because they know we gon' feed 'em. We know I take some in, I stop some mama's from-- "Okay baby you need to cool out. Okay, you can't beat 'em. You can't beat the hell out of them all the time." You know, and what-have-you. So, I think that in some instances here in Detroit community, we have small villages--

D: It's gotta broaden--

A: Yeah, yeah. And also, I think that people know who the mamas are. Like you know, you know they call me Mama Akua.

D: Yep.

A: And some people say, you know, they just come to me and it's almost like o-- on the grill and say, "You got to help me." You know.

D: Yes.

A: Or like when the brother -- one of them junkies was comin' up on me -- and the other junkie said, "Man, don't mess with her." *(Laughs)*

(EVERYONE laughs)

A: I mean, seriously. That is what happened. He said, "Don't mess with her." I was down before they tore down the projects. I'm sayin' that to say that I think we have to have more faith in our folks too.

D: Mhm.

[[00:06:00]] - A: We put so much emphasis on what's wrong that we don't talk, or lift up what's right.

D: Well, that's what uh, I can say -- we the people of Detroit -- we have intentionally, uh, dedicated ourselves to build up and celebrate--

A: No, but I know that.

D: Yeah.

A: That what Harold said. That's why I didn't have a problem with sayin', "Okay, what are you tryin' to do?" I-- I'm not just an organizer, I'm a hell of a administrator, okay? I say that to you because what I will do is say, "Okay now, what you tryna do, and how do we need to format this?" And they'll move out yo' way so you can do what you do, you know. Because I -- because that fear of them just seein' a white face still now that you're comin' to be a perpetrator, or you're one of the--

D: "We're here to--"

A: "Save you!"

D: Yeah. *(Laughs)*

A: Oh, yeah. If anybody else comes to "save me"... okay? That is really the attitude. I mean, they have talked to me that way and I have laughed my behind off down in Midtown. Because I was in a meeting -- this a couple years ago -- I was in a meeting and they were busy talkin' about uh, what they were doin' and what we were gonna do, and I said New Center. "Oh, no it's not New Center anymore, it's Midtown." I said, "It's 'Midtown' to you. It's 'New Center' to *me*."

D: I think it went out there.

(At [[00:07:19]] the women proceed to talk about eating and going out to eat until the end of the interview)

END

[[00:08:29]]