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Bernard Herman (BH): Today is Tuesday, September 28. This is Bernie Herman. I’m sitting here chatting with Miss Violet Lewis Pettijohn at 2 Terry Lane in Terry Manor. Alright I’ll just set these right here and we’re all set to go. Miss Pettijohn, could you start by telling me about growing up in the neighborhood.

Violet Lewis Pettijohn (VP): Well, I was born at 115 North College Avenue in Newark, Delaware, and we lived on the corner of Ray Street. Creek Road and cattycorner was Prospect Avenue. We were the only black family right through there. Next door was, going down Creek Road, you had to go down a long hill, was the Jameses and they was there for as long as my grandfather was there, and Ray Street was basically a black neighborhood. Prospect Avenue was a white neighborhood, but across from us on North College were white families, but to me it was a good growing up because everybody was close. There was no—it might have been a segregation in a whole lot of ways because when I was little I didn’t know nothing about no segregation or nothing because we got along with everybody in the neighborhood, but when it came time to go to school, I didn’t think about it too much when I was young. We had to go up to New London Avenue School, and all the kids that I played with in the neighborhood who were white, went to—

[Tape shuts off.]

BH: Let’s get started again here, and you were talking about the schools.

VP: Yes, well, my girlfriends who lived up on Prospect, they were white, but we played together all the time when we were young, and my grandfather worked with her father who did—they’d run around and did yard work with people around Newark, and we used to call them Snob Hill [?] and all kind of things like that because these were people with money anyway, but the Deans lived up there and we played together all the time, but when it comes time to go to school, they didn’t go to our school. It didn’t bother us. In those days we knew we had to go up there, and they went wherever they went.

BH: This is George Wilson.

VP: That’s what it is now, yes. It was New London Avenue School. We went from the first three grades and then we’d go by bus to Wilmington to Howard High School. Everybody that went, went there and graduated, and went to college and wherever they had to go, but never heard anything about—we had to ride a school bus and now people’s kicking about school kids being bussed, and they did that for years up there, and I mean years, because there’s people much older than me that did the same thing, that had to go to Howard High School. Howard, I can say, was a good school because a lot of people were equipped to go to college. What stopped them was money. You didn’t have no money to go. I went for a year at Del[aware] State, but our mothers didn’t have no money to send me. But it wasn’t too bad. The only thing I didn’t like was the
word ‘nigger,’ and I was very, very—man I’ll tell you, I could really answer somebody back, because I was tough anyway because my brothers, my mother made me take care of them sometimes and if they hit me—I learned how to fight and stuff when I was very young. I really did. Nobody bothered me. Nobody even bothers me now. I was just tough, but my mouth got me in trouble. My mother would smack me in my mouth, [inaudible.] I had a toothache. That was it. But anyhow.

BH: You told me, I think, at the Elks Lodge about the time that the, was it a white girl, turned and called?

VP: She called me a nigger and I’m running from my house down College Avenue after her, and my mother was coming home from work and she had [inaudible.] she beat me right out there on the [inaudible.] I wasn’t no little [inaudible.] either. She beat me right ‘cause she said ‘Nigger is not your name,’ and this is when I heard, ‘Sticks and stones will break your bones, but names will never hurt you and don’t you ever do it again.’ Well that girl and I ended up to be good friends after that, but I’ll tell you what a [inaudible.] on her, and she knew it too, ‘cause she knew I was a tough big [inaudible.], and the white girls used to—we didn’t have the running water. We had an outside privy and my grandmother in the summer used to, because we lived with our grandparents, and my grandmother in the summer used to put a wooden tub out on the back porch ‘cause it’d be so hot, and I’d have my [inaudible.] The Dean girls would come over and get in the tub with me. No white didn’t rub off on me, and no black on them, so this is how we grew up, and my brothers, they were good too. People really liked them. Some of them used to shine shoes, stuff like that, but I can remember the first time I made twenty-five cents by going across the street and washing a woman’s dishes, and I did that after school for a long time, but Mrs. Kendall taught me a lot because she taught me how to set the table, and then she would have a tea, and I can remember the first time I was learning how to serve and was getting ready to pour the woman’s tea, and she did something and bumped into me, and scalded herself, but it was, she admitted it was her fault. But man, I thought I’d never to learn to do nothing like that no more, but I ended up helping my mother later on in life to do parties and things like that, and serve people, and my mother used to cater a whole lot of people around here. She worked for a lot of University people. She did the same thing that I ended up doing too, working in people’s households and stuff.

BH: What was your mom’s name?

VP: Her name was Cathy Lewis.

BH: And your grandparents?

VP: Caroline was my grandmother, and David Lewis Sr. was my grandfather.

BH: And were they from Newark as well?

VP: Grandpop was from Glasgow. Grandmom was from, I can’t remember the exact town, up in Pennsylvania. She was part Indian. My grandmother was part Indian, and my mother had Aunt Mary, Aunt Virginia, Uncle David, and who else was it. It was one I never knew, and she was
the youngest. She died. Her name was Lillian and she died when she was real young, but my Aunt Virginia lived up the hill beyond the school and she was 97 when she died, and she lived up there on the farm and worked, and worked up there for the Lubbocks. You know them? No. They probably were gone by the time you moved here, but she used to walk that hill, walk up Coral [?] Street and everyday she went worked on the farm. She raised her own family and did a lot of things. Most of my mother’s people died young. Mama was 47. Aunt Mary was 52, and one was 18. Of course there was [inaudible.] she lived the longest really. I forget how old Uncle David was.

BH: Well as I recall you’re 81. Is that correct?

VP: Yes. I’ll be 82 in December.

BH: That’s close. You got a birthday coming up.

VP: Yes, if I live that long. I had one birthday party in my life, and my daughter gave it to me. One time I came off of work and opened the door, the house was full of people. I was 40. It’s the only birthday party I ever had in my life. I don’t want no more, because it scared me to death. But basically the people in the area were good people. Everybody helped one another. Those days they did. They don’t do that stuff no more. One family would help the other family and these were poor times. If somebody didn’t have enough wood and stuff or coal and stuff, everybody helped one another. That was the [inaudible.] now. There’s so many more new people in the area, that there’s not a closeness like it used to be, but almost all of the families that are still around here are close. You know, the old school like, Winston and Fats and all of them, but Fats lived with us for a time after his mother moved to Philadelphia and stuff like that, but people did a little bit more than they do now, and course right now as you see, it’s full of University people. They don’t bother me. They bother some people. They don’t bother me, ‘cause when I go to sleep I’m gone. They have parties and things that’s alright. Only thing I don’t like is to come home and find a whole bunch of trash on my lawn. That bothers me more than anything, and I got a mean streak in me too. I throw it right in the street. Let the street man pick it up. Sometimes I have taken it, picked it up, and thrown it across the street [inaudible.] in. I said something too. It’s funny, when guys are living in that household over there, and they drink beer and stuff a lot, but they don’t make as much trash as the women. You hear? ‘Cause [name] had to call the girl the other day. There’s a walnut tree down there, and so the walnuts fall anywhere, and she was picking up walnuts from her lawn and throwing it over here. Well I don’t say nothing to them, but she did, she told them, ‘You just moved up here. You don’t do that.’ But the churches have been fine and the people have been fine, and it’s kind of sad sometimes to see a lot of people that you grew up with that’s not here anymore, but lots of them have moved away but there are people that move in, and that’s it. You don’t know people. I get along with the University people, but you see in the paper sometimes a lot of people in a lot of areas don’t. They have somebody to mow the lawn and stuff like that, and sometimes they have a lot of noise right over in there. They’ll call and say ‘Call us if we’re making too much noise,’ and I guess that’s to keep you from calling the police because she has called the police. I haven’t called them because I don’t hear them, but the only thing I don’t like is the trash. A lot of the older people, people that are older than me, there’s two of them that lives right next door, there’s not very many other friends now. They’ll be dying all out and then the younger ones come along
and take [inaudible]. I don’t know how they’re doing, but I got along with everybody. One of my work ladies said to me, not too long ago, ‘Miss Violet, I know that you have worked for about a thousand people and taken care of about a thousand or more kids,’ but my biggest pleasure is, sometimes, a lot of them has left here, and they’ll move away and they would come back to Newark to visit. They find some kind of way of knowing where I live and knock on my door. I work for a family, for Dr. Brooks, Dr. [name] Brooks, and he’s a pediatrician, and he moved first to Bethesda, Maryland, and I used to go down on the weekends and help him, and then when he decided to move out to the mid-west, well that was the end of that for me because I wasn’t going to leave here. You just don’t leave home, but I hear from him every once in awhile. I remember, he had six boys, and two of them were blind. They were blind before they left here because we all had to go be examined and see maybe, they didn’t know what caused it, but eventually they said that the mother had a virus when she—these are the two closest boys together, so the mother had a virus and something happened, but they eventually died. I heard from him. I used to hear from him periodically, but Mrs. Brooks used to take care of finding people. What do you call it when they look up your ancestors and things? What’s the name?

BH: Genealogy.

VP: She used to be into that, and so one year she went from out there to Washington to [inaudible] and she died. Her husband called to see if she got there safely and they told her they would try to get a hold of him, but she had died from a heart attack. So eventually I didn’t hear from him for a long time, and then I finally got a letter because before that she used to write me letters and tell me ‘bout all of them. I still got some of the things now. She talked about all of them and so I new where each one of them living, and married, and how many children and stuff like that, and then when one of the boys graduated from the University of Pennsylvania as a veterinarian, they came down and picked me up so I could go to his graduation, and after the graduation we just had a good time up there. The oldest one bought me home, that was Christian [?]. Now he’s a president of a college or something down in, it’s not Florida, it’s down in one of the southern states. I have to go through some of those things and look them up again now sometime, but he was married and ‘cause he brought his little child here with him, but every once in awhile I’ll hear from him. And I haven’t heard from Dr. Brooks in a time. I don’t know whether he ever got married, or—and I was older than them any how, Mr. and Mrs. Brooks, but we used to have a nice time together, and I can remember, you know, you remember lots of raising somebody else’s kids too, and they wouldn’t eat very well, especially if the mom was home, and I kept them all the time. I cooked for them and everything. If the mother was home, and she didn’t like this, or she didn’t like that, and if she wouldn’t eat it, they wouldn’t eat it, but when she was gone, whatever I fixed they ate, and I mean they ate it. You don’t give nobody no kids no dessert if they don’t eat the dinner, but they going to eat the dinner and then they can have the dessert. I did that anyway. I made them do it. But I’ve had an enjoyable life. I still am working. I work for, Mr. Lucas I’ve been working for about 42 years and he had one marriage and then he had another, and his first one he had a child with now, and that’s about seven years old now, but I work for the Dooneys. I work for the Johnsons, and I still work with people’s kids, and they know that they have to mind me, and some of them are older, you know like sixteen. One of them’s going on sixteen. They know they have to make—and when I go up there sometimes to the Dooneys I say, ‘You are going to make your bed, ‘cause I don’t make nobody’s bed. If you don’t make your bed, they don’t get made. But you’re old enough to know. So here
we go.’ And sometimes, the last time I was up there, he didn’t make his bed, [inaudible.] going to school. Anyhow, the other day he brought me down some food for his mother, ‘cause I work up there every other Friday. He brought me down some food, so I said, ‘Mikey, let me tell you something’—is that a cane over there?

BH: Oh that’s my umbrella.

VP: Oh, God, [inaudible.] must have had a cane and left it, well anyway, I said, ‘Miss [inaudible.], and I said, ‘But you know what? I don’t want to come up there next time and you haven’t made your bed, or you’re going to be sorry.’ ‘Oh, Miss Violet,’ he said, ‘I didn’t have time. You know I never like to get up in the morning,’ [Inaudible.]. ‘cause neither do I, but every once in awhile I see some of the people that I had worked for for years, and I never had any trouble working for anybody. I know Miss [name] is 97 and she used to be the head of the English department at the University of Delaware. Well she went to Cokesberry, and every once in awhile she come down and see me, but I looked at my calendar one day, and I hadn’t heard from her. Well anyway she finally called me. They stopped her from driving I guess so at ninety, but she said and now it’s so uncomfortable for me to sit up here and not be able to get to Newark and to see some of her friends, ‘cause that’s what she’d come here for. So one of her friends is going to take me up there to see her. I work for Miss Potter who’s in the English department and she teaches the graduate students. So, she bought her house, Miss [name]’s house, so she’s going to take me up there sometime to see her. But I don’t know what other things—

BH: Well I was wondering if you could tell me, you grew up in the neighborhood in the 1930s and I wonder what it looked like in the 1930s.

VP: Well, what did it look like in the 1930s? It didn’t look exactly like it is now, because across from the Elks Home, they had homes up there. Now they’re all, University owns them now. They tore them homes down. They tore them down.

BH: There was that row there.

VP: It was, from Wilson Street, all the way up, all the way down, and all the way down Cleveland Avenue, but all those homes are gone now, and one girl who lives there, not exactly across from the cliff, she said she wasn’t going to sell her place to the University, so her house is sitting there, but on the other side of her, the houses are all gone, and in the back of them, like over on Ray Street where I came up, I just sound silly but I say, ‘If my grandfather would come back here to walk around after he just died,’ I said, ‘He wouldn’t be able to find his way,’ [inaudible.] three of them over there. They all had homes over there. It was all homes over there.

BH: Is that the area called ‘The Hollow’ down in there?

VP: No. The Hollow is right next to where I was. Right there on the corner of North College, and Ray Street, and Creek Road. That’s where I lived, and right next to it they had a lane that went all the way down to the bottom of the hill. The only thing that’s still standing is a walnut tree, ‘cause the University got it too, and I can remember before the University got it, we let the city fire people, fire department, use the old house as a lesson for the guys who were learning. It
wasn’t very funny. I’m glad he did it on the day that churches were taking a picnic. The churches took a picnic and the kids got all the bus. [inaudible.] a messy crowd over there when somebody burned the house down, but when they first started the fire, the guy went up to put some stuff in it, so it would burn quickly, and there was a blast and then he jumped out that back window. It’s a wonder he hadn’t broke his neck, ‘cause those windows weren’t very big. But he jumped out that back window. We did have snakes over there. I have snakes over here, so it’s a mess. I called the city. They coming up here about that. It was one. I got ready to get my paper. I open the door to reach down to get my newspaper and I looked and here was a snake. Man, I tell you, and then the feller came to mow my lawn and he kind of scattered it a little bit. He ran out in the road, and somebody run over, and it was eight feet long. Yes. If I’d have touched that thing, I wouldn’t be talking to you now. I’m telling you that. Down in The Hollow was nice though. It had a nice big hill and we used to sled down there, all that stuff.

[Break to answer telephone.]

BH: So where were we here?

VP: I was talking about down in The Hollow.

BH: Oh, down in The Hollow. Yes.

VP: They had a spring down there, and white people used to go down and get water out of the spring ‘cause it was cold, and we had pump water, and lots of times they came over and had some of that pump water, and this happened for years and years and years, [inaudible.] there. The University bought our place, and their place too. We ain’t get nothing for it really, when you think about it. Two thousand dollars ain’t nothing for no property that my grandfather had owned for years. We had a nice place, and a great big corner lot that went—it could have been a couple houses on that lot, and we used to have a garden, and he always had vegetables and stuff, and sometimes we’d give it away, and my grandmother always put up stuff. We ain’t have no basements like people have now. We had what they called a cellar, and it was like a brick thing. Well she put up all kinds of food and put it down in there. We had a cellar door. We had to pull it up, and then have these wooden steps that go down there, but we always had fruit and vegetables all the time ‘cause grandma put up everything, and sometimes, lots of times, stuff was given away to people, because in those days people helped one another. We had a horse and a buggy and I can remember we used to go as far as, when I can remember, we used to go as far as Delaware City because one of her daughters lived there, with her family, and then we had a horse, we had a sleigh, great big sleigh and wintertime we got more snow and stuff than we get now. [Inaudible.] didn’t have no wheels, but we sure had that sleigh honey, and it was really heavy. I can remember grandpa. One time we had a blizzard and it hit the front part of our house, and we went to school. Grandpop came through the front and had a great big wooden [inaudible.] and dug us out, dug us out through to the road, to where the snow hadn’t covered too much, you know ‘cause the wind had blown it. We went to school, up here on the hill, and the principal came from, the [inaudible.] place right there, and where is it? Before you get to Wilmington.

BH: Oh.
VP: I’m trying to think of what they called it.

BH: What was that called? It’s where the Sears is.

VP: No. It’s on the other side-- Do you know where, not Governor Bacon, but the place where they used to take people to that had tuberculosis?

BH: Down near New Castle?

VP: No, that’s out there off of Kirkwood Highway. Where’s the police station out there?

BH: That’s what I’m trying to remember is the name of that. It’s near Marshallton.

VP: Yes, well that’s where it was, Marshallton, and the principal lived there down the bottom of that hill, but he came to Newark, and he would make a pot of vegetable soup, and everybody that made it to school ate it. If you didn’t have no breakfast, you ate it for breakfast and lunch, and if you was there too long you ate it for dinner, but those are the kind of things that happened. But to me it was enjoyable to walk to school in the snow. Kids can’t walk to school in no snow now. They close school down. That’s what they do, close it down. They don’t walk no place hardly.

BH: So what was the school like? What were classes like?

VP: Classes were good. We had some good teachers, in my time even. My mother’s teachers were different and older, but the teachers we had were good. We had first and second. We went up to the eighth grade. After the eighth grade, we had a graduation in June and then you would go to Howard High School if you were going to finish your schooling, but I can remember graduations were always so nice. We used to go out in the field, in Green’s Field, that’s what we called it, Green’s Field, because Mr. Green owned it, but that’s where the high rise for the University is now, and picked all the kind of flowers we could pick. We’d have a trellis of flowers. Graduations was really beautiful up there. All the years that I can remember of kids graduating before me, it was really wonderful. Lord have mercy, no more, no more. But you’re not supposed to turn back anyhow. But I liked those days. People were a little bit closer.

BH: Somebody told me that, well Green’s Field was an important place, there were blackberries there?

VP: Blackberries, gooseberries. I swear, my grandmother was putting up stuff, everything, and we had a cherry tree, a wild cherry tree. My grandfather made wine with that, made wine with it.

[Break to answer telephone.]

BH: I got your grandfather’s cherry wine.

VP: Oh man, I tell you. When my brother [name], if he reads this, then he’s going to get mad at me. He won’t get mad at me, I know, but grandfather had all kinds of wine. We’d go pick dandelions. Dandelion [inaudible] dandelion wine is good. Now that I know what it taste like
then, it was like champagne. It was good 'cause it was light, you know? It was white looking. People made wine out of everything years ago, but honey that was real—

[Woman enters room.]

Anonymous Woman: Well hi, how are you?

BH: I’m great how are you?

AW: Where did I see you? I saw you somewhere.

BH: At the Elks.

AW: Yes, yes. How are you doing?

BH: I’m doing well, yourself?

AW: Oh, pretty good. You’re talking to the first black female who ran for city council here.

VP: Yes, that’s right.

BH: I didn’t know you ran for city council.

AW: Yes.

BH: Why don’t you run again? I’ll vote for you. [Laughter.] I’ll vote twice.

VP: We need her to!

AW: I lost to Jane Tripp, but she only beat me by, I think, what was it? She had 123, and I had 76. So she only beat me by a little bit.

BH: Think of running again?

AW: I thought about it, but I’ve been watching the people who have been representing our area, and they’ve been pretty good people since Jane, and Osborne, I taught his children. I’ve been knowing him.

VP: I work with him.

AW: Sit down, sit down. I’ve been knowing him and I thought he’s doing a pretty good job. He speaks up, and I can call on him, or any constituent can call on him, and he’ll come out and view the situation, and he will survey it, get all the research on it, then get to it, and he’ll come through. So all of them have been able to do that, including all the way back to Gardener as mayor. So I mean, the people who run, before I think about running, I see what they’re into, and
see how much I know on them, and I make a decision. So right now I’ve been supporting the ones who’ve been there. [Inaudible.].

VP: I wish she’d have been born and raised around here, then she would be a good person to speak, because she’s a good school teacher. She just retired.

BH: She taught with Carol Peters I think.

VP: Yes. She taught at Wilmington and here, at Shue, and Newark High School. That’s where she retired from, and Mr. Osbourne who is our representative, worked in Newark High School for about twenty some years, and that makes it really good because I knew him anyway. He was a real nice, good person, and I haven’t had any real problems with the city except for that, who is that? Is that the Newark Police? I don’t know who that is. Can you see?

BH: Looks like Newark Police.

AW: Police drove up right there I thought he was there to put another ticket on my—I said, ‘Are you going to put another ticket on my van?’ He said, ‘No, I’m not.’ I said, ‘Oh, okay because I talked to Sergeant Williams yesterday and he knows that van is there, and I don’t want nobody else to put a ticket on there.’ No cars are supposed to be parked in the yard. They told us we had to move it out the back. We can’t put it on the street because it doesn’t have a tag on it, and it’s being sold, so the guy has to sit there until they tow it off, and oh [sighs.]. But the police are being very good. That’s a point for you. They take care of my tickets. Are you learning anything about Newark?

BH: I’m learning a lot.

VP: Back to grandpop’s wine, yes. My brother used to sneak down in that basement, get that wine, and then they had VE day or VD day or something like that.

BH: BE or BJ.

VP: Yes. People were all out in the street banging on anything, and he would give them some of grandpop’s wine. Lord have mercy. It was funny, ‘cause some old lady up the street, Miss [name], oh she drank so much of that wine and she was an old lady then. You should have seen her reelin’ and a rockin’ [laughs.]. It was really funny, I say. But our growing up was really good. We had discipline in the family, and I think families were closer together then, than they are now. There was no television and no all the things that the kids have to do, no all them games and stuff they have on the—we made our own fun, and that was another thing that was good for us. You don’t ever see any kids playing.

[Whispering.]

BH: That’s quite alright.
VP: There’s no— [To someone else: Just put in on the table ‘cause Danny’s going to come get it.]

AW: I’m sorry.

BH: It’s alright. I’ll see you soon.

VP: I’ll talk to you later. Anyways growing up wasn’t bad at all. You don’t see no kids playing jacks, marbles, nothing like that no more. Everything is so commercialized, and it’s okay. Changing times, changing people, changing everything. But you kind of miss seeing somebody playing hopscotch. And where I lived it was a dirt road, so you took something and dug down in the dirt and then had a hopscotch game. Then we’d play, in our front yard, we’d play marbles, you know. But it’s all different. I don’t knock a whole lot of things, but I think kids ought to be—play with one another in such a fashion that it’s not all that commercialized. We had a thing at our church about television and some—I have a book back there with it.

BH: Is this Mt. Zion?

VP: No, I go to the one up on the corner.

BH: St. John’s.

VP: Yes. I got to the one up on the corner. But the television is mostly advertisements, when you think about it. All those commercials that come in so many times, one right after the other, the selling-vision that’s what it is. I hardly ever look at television. I moved my television back to my bedroom because people were coming in and turning it on, and I don’t go to nobody’s house and turn nothing on. I don’t care what it is. So, you know what I look at night? Nick-At-Nite. I look at the old movies that the kids used to look at. They don’t look at those things no more, but I like them. It’s some of them I’ve seen. Bill Cosby and all that stuff. I like it, but I know that there’s a lot of things on there they shouldn’t, when their parents is not home. They don’t pull that stuff with me though. I don’t like it. Ray Street was all dirt road, all the way, and finally I don’t even remember when they put some asphalt and tar on there. I don’t even remember because I was grown practically. But I was born in that little old house over there, 1922, but things have changed. This is a university town. They have a right to buy and build and stuff like that.

BH: You were one of the first families to buy in Terry Manor, is that right?

VP: I’m trying to think of who did. I don’t even remember who did.

BH: George Wilson.

VP: Yes. George Wilson built it, and this is, she’s only the second person that’s ever lived in that house, and now they find that half the stuff that was done over there is not right. She had, not the last time it rained, but the time before that, that’s why that truck is up there. She’s got to build a wall in the back of her house, but her whole house, the city had to fix it because it flooded, and
even to some of the walls inside was moldy. I had one little speck of mold in here in my bedroom, and my brother just washed it with some Clorox, and that’s been several years ago and it’s never come back, but then the family up there—this place is built on top of a halfway swampy area ‘cause I can remember there was nothing up there but woods when we be going to school, and there was one little house that sit, over here like, and this old man, Mr. Fred Underhill lived there. He lived there for years and years and years, and when George Wilson got this place he built this. You can’t tell me that the city didn’t let him get off with a whole lot because there’s too much mold and stuff up in here. I really feel sorry for her, but the city had to pay for that stuff. Now she’s got to make a wall in the back of it. That’s what that thing … supposed to come and work. But now the city’s—she went down and got the permit ‘cause I was with her yesterday and now they said that they have to have some kind of, I don’t know what it is, but its got to go through a whole bunch of rigmarole, and she’s going to have to pay for it. The city don’t get back their money.

BH: So this was all woods and then George Wilson built Terry Manor.

VP: Yes.

BH: Actually, the neighborhood—where did it start and where did it end?

VP: Well, coming up Cleveland Avenue, there were all the homes that was there were white, except, you know where the Elks Home is? Next door to them was a black family, and that was it, but there’s two houses there, all the other houses is a double house, two double houses maybe on one, I don’t remember now, but there were just two black families lived there and the rest was white. On the other side of the street all the houses were white, and they had the store, we used to call it the white store, and there was a white family that owned it and we used to be able to buy penny candy and stuff like that. From there on down was white, and from there up through, there’s one house still stands there now, ‘cause she won’t sell to the University, was white. And then from there on, the University tore all the houses down to get up there to Wilson Street, and the rest of them down that street, I guess one of them’s been tore down, they talk about somebody building a house, part of the church property, which is directly on the corner because there used to be a store there that was black, and over on the other side, there’s the Elks Home, it used to be a little house there, and then Mr. Chambers had a store, and the Saunders’s owned from there to the corner because there used to be a place called ‘Snack Bar,’ but it’s all gone. On the corner, it’s directly on 896, was a house, and the rest of the things have been torn down, but they had built the house, right beyond the Elks Home now that’s for students, so somebody, white people, bought it. All up and down New London Avenue now there’s mostly white people own those homes anymore.

BH: But that was the old black neighborhood.

VP: That was the old black neighborhood.

BH: I’ve heard it called different names, The Row, The Village. What was the name?
VP: Well we called it New London Avenue. Everybody white called it ‘Nigger Row,’ but it was on both sides, black all the way down, and all the way down almost to the railroad tracks. It stopped at a certain point. The University has a building there, where they have I guess people go to check in and stuff in the mornings, and sign up in the mornings on where they going to work, but from there was Miss Lizzie Brown who lived there for years and years and years and they were old when they died, and coming up now, up on the corner, there used to be a lot, but then the minister from the Baptist church built a home there, and down that little street was all black, ‘cause I lived down that way with my husband and George Wilson had built this [inaudible.] it was vacancies down in there, so he built the house, and then he had another building that he had like the pool room, this was where the kids used to go and people go and shoot pool and stuff, and then the kids used to dance and stuff like that.

BH: This is down Church Street?

VP: Yes. We lived down in Church Street. We lived, let me see, I’m trying to think there was the minister on the corner, and Mrs. Brown lived in a little house that used to be the Baptist people worshiped in this. It wasn’t a house at first, but the Baptist people worshiped there, and on the outside it was a like a pool like thing. That’s where they got baptized, and then next door to her, I’m trying to think, [name] Barber built the house. It was on a vacant lot. Then the Roys lived next door to her. That house is still there. The house that we lived in is still there, and then there’s another one next to it, and it’s right next to Hollingsworth property. And on the other side George Wilson built their house, for the Gains family lived in there, one of the Gains’s that used to live down in The Hollow lives there.

BH: Still lives there.

VP: The girl from the Jameses lives there now, yes.

BH: David lives in that block too.

VP: David, yes, David [name] is right next to where Miss Brown had her little place that they called, it used to be the church, it was the First Baptist Church I guess there.

BH: And that building is still there?

VP: I’m trying to think if they didn’t tear it down.

BH: And then build a house there.

VP: David’s house is right next to where this people was.

BH: I just have to flip this [tape] over. I wanted to ask before we moved away from that part of the neighborhood is—I’ve heard people mention, the Saunders had a co-op. What was that? I’ve only heard about this. What was the co-op all about.

VP: Well it was where you could get a lot of food and things that was cheaper than going to the
grocery store, and it was like a club. People belonged to this and they evidently paid so much money to join it, but then, I didn’t belong to it, but I could go there and buy stuff, but it was on the other side of—you know where the Baptist church is now? It was down the street from there.

BH: Where that [inaudible.] is.

VP: Yes. That was the first place that was down there, because the Saunders owned that building and people, I remember, and Bee Shipman and her family lived over top, and then there were several other families that moved in afterward, but it was like, I guess they call them apartments now, but they didn’t call them apartments then, you know. But the co-op was there and then there was one, two houses up there. All those houses have been sold and built again or re-built or something, and then the Baptist church and house that was alongside the Baptist church is gone now, because Emma Patrick lived there for years and then when she retired to go to-

[Tape ends.]

VP: — and coming up the street was, just family homes, family homes.

BH: So what was the area like around the Elks Lodge?

VP: It was a great big building there because it was a school. It used to be a school house.

BH: The Elks Lodge used to be the old school house.

VP: No, no. The Elks Lodge was the Elks Lodge. The school house was a great big two story building. After the school house left there they had community things there, and down the bottom, down on the first floor, and up top, people used to have rooms or something, and bathrooms and stuff like that. I guess it was torn down I don’t know. I can’t remember whether it was torn down or burnt. I don’t think it burnt down, I think it was torn down.

BH: Okay, so that was the old school, but then the building at School Hill replaced it.

VP: That’s right. Yes. That’s it.

BH: And did you go to both schools?

VP: No. I only went to the one up on the hill. I went from the first grade to the eighth up on the hill. So that’s been a long, long time ago. I have even a picture of my mother in her graduation from when she graduated from the old school.

BH: Oh I would love to see that sometime. That would be great.

VP: I don’t know where it is.

BH: Well we can have another visit at some point.
VP: I’ll get my pictures together ‘cause I have to show you. My grandmother was part Indian, my grandfather was part white, so people used to say this, that, and the other. Somebody said the other day something about, on a thing in the paper about the Ku Klux Klan getting fired up, black guys raping white women, well what did they ever say about the white man raping slaves? That’s where all the different colors coming from. You understand? I don’t hate nobody. I don’t hate nobody, but why keep this stuff going? And then another thing, half the time, the boy ain’t raping no white girls, ‘cause I know how they acted down at Newark High School. I worked down there for years, and the guys who are athletes hanging out [inaudible]-- the girls was doing this, not black girls the white girls. Do you understand what I’m saying?

BH: I hear you.

VP: And so, why do people do and say these things? Why do people hate one another when you do the same thing yourself? You understand what I’m saying? My grandfather, like he said one time, something about, my grandmother didn’t rape no white man. You understand what I’m saying? I can remember the time that he found out where some of his family was living, right across from Central School there on, Academy Street? And he went down to show himself and to meet them, and the next thing we know, they done packed up and left. Never did see them no more. You understand what I’m saying?

BH: Yes ma’am.

VP: I work for a girl who, part of her mother’s family is white, part of it is black. They come from the south, and the white part, the white people don’t even speak to the black ones. She’s not really black, black. She’s a good-looking woman. She’s now in a nursing home, but she’s a good-looking woman, but why? It’s none of your doing, you know? So if you’ve got your blood systems are the same, why you going to hate somebody? You understand what I’m saying? I don’t know why people do that, and I’ll tell you what, God’s getting tired of a whole bunch of mess on this earth, ‘cause man ain’t doing what-- they came over here to settle in this country so they could worship God in their own way. Where’s God anymore? He’s nowhere. He’s nowhere. Honey, we’re all going to have to pay the penalty one day, but it’s coming, and it won’t be in my time I know, but it’s coming, and our hate is going to kill us all [inaudible] to hell, you hear? If God wants us to have love in our lives toward one another, that’s why I, I’ve been the devil too, ‘cause I’d cuss somebody out if they wasn’t good to me, you know? You understand what I’m saying? It’s coming, it’s coming. But Newark, I think it’s grown in a whole lot of ways. I think it’s changing. I think it’s grown in a whole lot of ways. I think it’s grown. I think it’s changed. I don’t hear the word ‘nigger’ so much, but anybody could be a nigger. It’s the actions. That’s what my mother was trying to soak in my head when somebody would call me that and I’d want to fight. You understand what I’m saying? Because anybody [inaudible] according to your actions, that’s what she told us. You learn lots of stuff when you’re growing up too. It’s too bad that we can’t live in this world and get along. I look at all of these companies that’ve had this business with the tornados, and the black people from Haiti. Starving, drinking water from dead people, people have been dead in the water and stuff. Can’t some of these companies help these people? I worked at the University of Delaware for years, and they threw more food away than a man in the moon, and I know they doing the same thing now. If you were caught taking something home, they’d fire you in a second. I remember, they were going to throw all these pies away. I took a pie and I took it downstairs and put it on the
outside, on a window sill, and the guy who used to distribute things to different areas and stuff, and he came upstairs and he said, ‘Whoever put the pie in the window sill better not go and pick it up because the [inaudible.] was watching and whoever picked the pie up was going to get fired.’ I tell you, I didn’t bring that pie home that night, but I could’ve killed that woman, and she put it in the garbage. Now why? We used to have a man come from the country to take stuff for his pigs, but anything was left in them pots, and them pans, went in the garbage, and they probably still do that. I worked through two presidents at the University, and one of them I don’t think nobody liked too much. I’m trying to remember what his name was ‘cause I hated that man, and everybody else did too, but I worked with my mother a whole lots of times, ‘cause she taught me almost everything I know too, but we would dust. We would shine things. We would dust. We’d do everything, and then you could watch him coming in sometimes and he’d take his hand and go do like that. My mother said, ‘One of these days,’ she said, ‘I feel like I’m going to hit him in the head with something,’ but she wouldn’t let me open my mouth, ‘cause I started to, but, no. He was a mess. He lived right up there in that big house up on West Main Street. It’s awful the way people are, the way they do things, but why? [Inaudible.].

BH: Well I wanted to ask you about one other thing. Tell me a little about the history of St. John’s. That’s your church isn’t it?

VP: Yes. Let me see if I can find my book. We had the hundred and fiftieth anniversary, and now this year we’re supposed to have a—let me see if I can find my book.

BH: Alright.

[Pause. Tapes shut off.].

VP: I can remember this. Our church really looked something like this. Oh, here’s my grandparents picture, too. It was taken in Atlantic City years and years ago.

BH: You favor your grandmother.

VP: Somebody else said that too, and I guess my mother must have favored her too because my brother said to me one day when I was in the car with him, he said, he had to look out to the side mirror and he said, ‘You look just like mamma.’ I said [inaudible.] look like my father,” He said, ‘You look just like mamma,’ so.

BH: They look very well to do here.

VP: Who? Oh, they were snazzy people. We were poor, but you know what? We were poor, but you would never have known it. Never in the poor times, we didn’t have to get in the bread line, like people went down to get bread and whatever else they were giving out. We didn’t never have to do it because that garden—we had chickens, pigs, we even had a cow one time. We had [inaudible.] over there on that corner, and guineas, guineas. Only thing, Grandpa used to hate the guineas because they steal the nest. They go up in the woods and make a nest, and stuff like that, but yes I can remember. But this is what our church looked sort of like years ago. Now this part in the back was not on there, but in the back was another building that’s not there anymore, and
it had two parts to it. In the bottom part they would have social gatherings and stuff like that, and upstairs they would have Sunday School and stuff like that, but that’s what it more or less looked like years ago. And the only thing too was, they had a outside privy. That’s what I first remember we started off with, an outside privy, but it was really a nice—our church is fuller then than it is now. We don’t hardly have nobody in it now, but it’s slowly gathering back together again. We have a good minister now. We’ve always had good ministers as I can remember, ‘cause when you’re young you respect people anyhow, and even if you don’t know too much about some things they’re talking about. I have started to go to Bible study so I can understand the Bible a little bit more anyways, because I think it’s important that you know. Do you go to Church?

BH: Sometimes.

VP: Where you go?

BH: I go down in Virginia. I’m actually Jewish, so.

VP: Oh, it doesn’t matter. A lot of people don’t have—it’s almost as bad as them calling us something, Jewish people are. But you know how I feel about it? They’re God’s chosen people. I don’t care what they say about them crucifying Jesus and all like that. Jesus is in y’all. Period. That’s it, and I have never called nobody names [inaudible.] down that street, but if you’re Jewish it doesn’t make any difference to me, and until people realize what you are or who you are, don’t mean nothing. It’s right here. The love in your heart that you have for everybody and Jesus, that’s what he preaches, love. Love, love, love. ‘Til this world comes to it, what’s going to happen? It’s going down, and down, and down, and everybody has their own feelings towards their religion. The Muslims have theirs, the Christians have theirs, the Jewish people. Everybody, but there’s one God. Until we realize that, that’s it. I’m telling you, this business of fighting and fighting. My oldest brother went to service, and he went AWOL, and when he went AWOL he came back to Philadelphia, and he used to fight. He was a boxer. Sometime I’ll show you a picture of—he fought Sugar Ray Roberts. It was an exhibition fight, but he didn’t knock him out. Neither one knocked each other out. My brother used to have a whole, it was a whole houseful of guys. James was the only one who, born [inaudible.] working so they could survive, but they all went AWOL too, and this happened for a long time. My brother [inaudible.] anyhow. My Uncle David got married to my mother and turned him in, so before they picked him up, my mother got a hold of this. She warned my brother, and all of them packed up and they went, they turned themselves in, and they put them in a camp out in Seattle, Washington or someplace, and I can remember James writing home, saying they had to sweep the city streets with a toothbrush. Can you imagine? [Laughs.] They were being punished. I can see them now, but he came back to service, and he went back to fighting, and then he finally got a job at the Chrysler, and that’s where he was I guess, when he died. He’s been dead now for about four or five years, I guess. His wife just died not too long, well she died too, because they smoked, and she had lung cancer, so she didn’t last too long with that. I smoked too. My daughter works in the hospital. My granddaughter’s now in nursing school, so [inaudible.] mother stop smoking because of lung cancer and stuff like that so I told her I did, and one day she called me, and Lindsay, my friend was there, and he said, ‘Who are you talking to?’ I said, ‘My daughter.’ He said, ‘Let me speak to her,’ no, he grabbed the phone. He says, ‘Yes [name], your mother’s still smoking,’ and then
he got ready to run out the door. I could have killed him. I called him everything, but [inaudible]. I called him everything, and he got through that door and he just left. My daughter said, ‘Mother, you’re not still smoking are you?’ and I said, ‘No, I’m not. Lindsay telling you a bare faced lie,’ but after we finished talking, I went up in my freezer and I had six packs of Philip Morris left, and part of a pack in my pocketbook. I cut them up and threw them away, and I haven’t smoked since, ‘cause you’re not supposed to lie to your children, and Lindsay ruined it for me. I’m telling you. I could have killed him. Now, I don’t cuss him no more, and he antagonizes me, and I said, ‘No, Lindsay,’ and just said last night, when he came in here, I had company. I said, ‘Lindsay you can say all you want, I ain’t cussing anymore.’ ‘Cause I’m asking the lord to let me stop and get away from that business. I’m not cussing no more. So that’s that. But anyhow, where were we anyway? You get off of one thing, on to something else.

BH: Do you remember the Bell’s Funeral Home?

VP: Yes.

BH: They had a little club there?

VP: Yes, Wagon Wheel. Yes.

BH: What was that like?

VP: It was wonderful. It was wonderful. You had to be twenty-one to go back up in there, but sometimes they had family picnics and things like that, and young people, but they didn’t sell no liquor to nobody, but they had entertainment. It was just nice, and in summertime it was really wonderful because they’d have a baseball game over on the school, and it was just a party, wonderful, family place. It really was, and Miss Emily Bell could cook, cook, cook. She could really cook.

BH: What was she best known for?

VP: Well, you know, what we all known for, the chicken, potato salad, but she could make it, oh man, and macaroni and cheese. This is a part of our food [inaudible]. That’s why I’m big and fat now [laughs]. And I tell you something else, people don’t make it much now anymore, homemade rice pudding. You ever eat that?

BH: I love rice pudding.

VP: Honey, the old time way, and my grandmother made hers. She didn’t cook the rice, she used the raw rice, and then every once in awhile she’d turn it over in the oven. Oh, man. And some people used to put the raisins in it. I didn’t care how they fixed it, I liked it. Period. I really liked it. But now, a lot of people boil the rice now and do it. My girlfriend just down the street just sent me some the other day, ‘cause she makes it every once in awhile, and at the church they like her to make it, the rice pudding so. I said Betty don’t bring me no whole big bad thing like you did before because I end up eating it all. Eat it, oh man, I do.
BH: Well I’ll have to keep an eye out for the next time there’s a church supper.

VP: Okay, because they really are. You missed something, oh we had something Saturday. This Saturday just passed on the night of [inaudible]. It cost twenty-five dollars apiece for everybody, but it turned out to be really nice. You had to dress up, and so I was like a head of the table, and I sold more tickets than I was supposed to sell, but there were some people who didn’t have anybody at the table, so they had someplace to sit, but I was like a hostess, so I was the head of my table. It was really elegant. Everybody was all dressed up. It was just lovely, and they had a little program with the kids, and [inaudible] she almost did the whole thing, ‘cause she made all, everything. We had to fix our own centerpiece, and so my daughter makes those kind of things over there, so I took some of those things, and I had a hat, a gold hat. My table was purple and gold. I had a gold hat and I put some of those things in it and then put some leaves on the top of it and then whoever had a dove on their coaster, took the centerpiece home. My daughter makes all kinds of stuff. She does, but she sells them at the mall. Most all of my earrings. The earrings I wore and the necklace I wore with my outfit. She makes them and she sells them. She sends me some stuff sometimes, but that was nice, but they have some nice, good church dinners too.

BH: Before we get too far away from the Bell’s. You said they had all kinds of entertainment up there?

VP: Yes. They had entertainment up there, and they had a swimming pool. A lot of people don’t swim around here. I always have swam, ‘cause I used to go up the creek. That’s where I learned with my brother. I taught some girls how to swim. Most of them don’t know how because they’re afraid of water, but I still swim. I went on a cruise one time and they had swimming on the boat. Nobody on our bus went swimming but me, but you know, a lot of other people was in there. But they had a swimming pool, and they had swings and things like that for the kids to be on, and it was just nice up there.

BH: So what kind of entertainment did they have?

VP: Well somebody would come and, like a three piece band or something like that, and then sometimes they’d have records playing, and some people would dance. They had a little place where people would dance and everything. It was just nice. Somebody said he was going to make, Sammy was going to build condominiums up there, but it’s all vacant now. The house is still there, and its some furniture and stuff still in it, but nobody lives on that property now, but he does have it cut down if the weeds get too high, but we always thought he was going to open it up. The Bell’s had a funeral business, and so now [inaudible] have it, and that’s Miss Emmy’s grandson, her daughter’s son, but they never done it. But it’s not even been built up now. We thought it was going to be done, but it hasn’t been started I guess. It hasn’t been started though. I don’t know what they’re going to do with it, but it was always a sad thing when Jim Bell died, his family kept it open for awhile, but then she couldn’t do it by herself. But it was always a sad thing for us, because we were just brought up to be able to go up there and I didn’t drink too much. I didn’t drink nothing much of anything. I might drink a little wine or something like that, but my husband used to drink. He wasn’t no drunk, but he drank. I didn’t drink all that much. In fact, when my daughter graduated from high school I got her a bottle of champagne, her first pack of cigarettes. Champagne, first pack of cigarettes, and a box of rubbers, and she said,
‘What’d you get those for?’ and I said, ‘Just in case you change your mind, you know.’ She [inaudible] and just because I don’t [inaudible] she graduated before about five or six girls up, and went down to, this was when they integrated then, went down to the school down there, and when they got ready to graduate from Newark high school, only three of them were graduated, the rest of them had babies and [inaudible]. And I said these words, ‘To hell with you, I’ll raise my daughter the way I want,’ and I told her, ‘If you’re well worth having, you’re well worth waiting for.’ So that was it, and that’s what she did. I had two grandsons, two grandchildren, and they both have done well. My daughter’s done well too. I thank God every day for all three of them. I asked the Lord to let me live to see them grow up. Well they all of them grown up now. I just had my first great grandchild, and Ricky’s thirty-nine. Lana’s thirty-two. She’s not married. She’s been to three colleges. Ricky used to tutor her when she was in ninth grade, ‘cause she wasn’t doing very well. He was in college. He was tutoring her, and when she graduated from high school, Ricky said, ‘Look at that.’ We were there. She got every scholarship that they had to offer. She got all kinds of awards. She got everything. She decided to go to the University of Michigan, which paid the whole four years. [Inaudible.] He said, ‘I don’t know how come you got more than I.’ He got a partial scholarship, but she got the whole scholarship. ‘I don’t know how come you got all you got, and I had to tutor you in the ninth grade,’ that’s what he did. But she went four years to the University of Michigan, then she decided to go into research. She went into research and something happened. The boss man came in one morning with three of them there, and he said, ‘Who left the top of that, loose?’ It was one of them great big jugs that had chemicals in it, and he went over to put the top on it, and it blew him up two stories high, and when it came down he was dead. [Inaudible.] So then she went to Wayne University. She graduated from there in Communications. She got a job, and in four months she was downsized, and she didn’t have no job. You know where she is now? She’s got another year of nursing. She’s going to nurse school. When I was out there, she showed me some of her marks. She’s getting As because see she had Chemistry and Physics, and all those things. I said Lana you should have just went on and been a doctor like you said you going to do in the first place. She said, ‘Well, Grandma [inaudible]’ but all her life growing up had been in school so she’s got another year to finish and [inaudible.] called me last night. She teaches tennis, and guess what happened? She’s been teaching tennis ever since she was in high school. She stepped on a ball and broke her ankle. Today she’s taking her to get some crutches and stuff like that, so she’ll be able to get around, but she’s still in school. She’s still in nursing school. And they had given her a job, and this was nice too because it helped her pay for her gas, they’d given her a job with a old couple and she has to take care of them three times a week, and when they put her in the hospital [inaudible] the people really didn’t want her to leave, and when my grandson got married, she was going to take off a couple days, and they were going to send somebody else in her place and they said no, they’d wait on Lana to come back, and then she had to leave eventually anyway. So she’s doing alright. She’s doing alright. I just, I thank God I lived to see them all grow up, and they all have done fine, and God has blessed me for letting me be able to see it. I told the minister, if I died the next minute, I’d die happy indeed, because my family I know is not going to turn back and do bad. They’re not going to do it. No, no, and I know that when my grandson got married, and they had a little baby, and they named the baby after his sister and mother, I said ‘Lord, have mercy, now I got two Lanas and two Gloria’s middle name is Yvonne, so there you go. There you go.
BH: Well Miss Pettijohn, I think I have to wrap it up. I have to go teach, but I hope I can come back down—

VP: Where you teach? At the University?

BH: I teach up at the University.

VP: Well you call me, and don’t leave nothing on my answering machine. I don’t know how to get it. My brother bought me a new phone. I don’t know nothing about no—I’m not very mechanical, period. So I can’t get my answering machine. When people call and leave me—‘I called you such and such and left you a message.’ I don’t get it. So if you call me, I’m usually home on Mondays and Tuesdays and I’m home in the evenings, ‘cause I still go to work. [Inaudible:]. I go to work to keep from going nuts.

BH: Well I’d like to come back and absorb all of this that we’ve done today.

VP: Yes, maybe I can find some pictures or something.

BH: Some pictures would be great, and one things we’re going to do is, one of the folks that I teach with is a photographer, and I was talking to him about the people I was interviewing, and he volunteered to do really nice portraits of each person I interviewed.

VP: Well it wouldn’t be me looking like this! [Laughs.]

BH: No, but I’d give you plenty of notice. So that’s something else that we can look forward to.

VP: Okay, and I also picked this up too—

[Tape ends.].