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Interviewee: Clarence "Pepper" Wigham

Interviewer: Bernard Herman

Bernard Herman (BH): Alright so we're set and we can just let those go. Why don't you start and tell me a little bit about yourself, about your family, about growing up here?

Clarence "Pepper" Wigham (CW): Well my name's Clarence Wigham. I'm [inaudible.] forty three years old. I've lived in Newark just about all my life. My mother name's Pearl Swann, Swann family, my brother Pedro Swann was a big all American high school, all American football player here in Newark. My grandfather came here by way of Philadelphia, name's Horace Swann. My grandmother [name] Swann. He's from Virginia and he came up this way here to work on Independence Hall, and how he ended up in Newark was he, from Newark, came to work on the Old College. I'm not sure of the dates, but in that time there, blacks could go and socialize was down Port Deposit, where he met my grandmother. They married and resided here in Newark, so the Swann family came here. [inaudible.] I don't know if I'm beating down the right road or not.

BH: No this is great. What did he do at Independence?

CW: He was a stone man, a stone mason. He worked with stone and that's how he came here and worked on the Old College.

BH: So he did the first, the early restorations?

CW: Yes, and also he worked on the city hall.

BH: Really?

CW: In this area, like I said, all the blacks, back then, back in that time, they couldn't go to places or clubs or anything. So Port Deposit's where all the blacks met to hang out, and that's where he met my grandmother, and they got married and bought a house at 69, 6769 New London Road, right over here on the corner.

BH: And it's still standing?

CW: Yes the house is still there. And that's where I grew up at, right there on the corner.

BH: Do you still live in Newark?

CW: Yes, I still live in Newark. I live on Ray Street.

BH: Oh, okay.

CW: We lived there probably up to 1975, '76, when my mom married Edward [name] That's when we moved to Ray Street, 60 Ray Street.

BH: Where did your grandfather come from in Virginia? Do you know?

CW: He was born and raised on the James River plantation. If I understand it correctly he was born and raised in slavery. His mother worked in the kitchen for James River plantation.

BH: But he didn't ever say which county, or-- ?

CW: No, I don't know much none of that. That one my brother might remember 'cause my brother and my grandfather talked a lot, my brother Pedro. They talked a lot. You see, that's how I know about all that. In fact that's where the Swann family [inaudible].

BH: So they came, after Philadelphia, he came to Newark?

CW: He married. He had his first wife. He had another set of kids that lived in Philadelphia, but his wife passed away, and he came to Newark.

BH: Do you remember about when that was?

CW: Well, let's see, my mom was born in 1930.

BH: And she was born in Newark?

CW: Yes. So there was three of them, and she was the youngest. She was the youngest and she had a sister, a brother. There was my Aunt [name], my uncle Danny, and my mom.

BH: And she was born here in 1930, we can find her in the 1930 census, and I'll look it up and let you know what—

CW: Yes, right, okay, yes, yes. I know 1930, March 22, 1930. I knew that. That I can say [laughter]. I knew that one. I can remember that one for sure.

BH: So you were born and grew up right around the corner here.

CW: Yes.

BH: So what was it like growing up, and you're forty-three?

CW: Forty-three.

BH: So what was it like growing up in Newark?

CW: It was fun. For me it was fun. For all of us, it was fun for all of us. All the guys I grew up, we had fun. Following in his footsteps, my brother and his friends. They were good role models. They were all good athletes. They were great athletes. We went to

Newark High School, which was a great football team. Undefeated for many, many years. So we had a lot of fun stuff to do, and they made a lot of fun stuff to do. We'd always make up games right here on Cleveland Avenue. You know, Ray Street there, I was telling you earlier, that's where we hung out at. Played hide and go seek, hot bread and butter beans.

BH: I've never heard of that one.

CW: What?

BH: Hot bread and butter beans.

CW: Hot bread and butter beans. Come get your supper. Yes. That was fun. That's when you hide a belt [laughter.], and you hide a belt and then you go try to find it. And you had a pole, or whatever you make the base, and you make it to that base, you know you [inaudible.] That's what it was called, hot bread and butter beans.

BH: And you said this when we were talking before, you were talking about how the neighborhood has changed, that buildings are gone and what it was like. Could you sort of paint me a picture of what it was like here? Let's say, this would be what, the early seventies?

CW: Well, yes. Well, on Cleveland Avenue there were the row houses, that was on [inaudible.] the addresses here would be on right across from the Elks Lodge. There were row houses there, and it was a [name] family, the Conkeys, and the March family house. There was Mrs. Saunders house. Then on the Elks side was the Pointdexter's Liquor Store, which had apartment buildings connected to it, and then on the other side of The Lodge was two big trees, and that's where the older guys would sit underneath that tree there and just talk 'bout everyday life. That was the thing. You came home from school, seeing them guys in the summertime, sitting underneath there, just sitting there talking, or they'd have went out fishing or something and [inaudible.] there, and that's where you heard all the stories. Like you see on TV and stuff, where the old guys sitting underneath the tree, the wise men I guess you could call them. But that was the thing growing up. And then there was, like I was telling you earlier about the beer garden used to sit right across the street from Ray Street. That's where my brother and them guys his age hung out at. So that was the thing growing up, being in the sixties, you know you growing up, that's where all the older guys—see that's where you wanted to hang out, to hear all the good stuff. You always heard all the stories, and then [inaudibleU] we have School Hill, which is now, it was called School Hill, for many, many years, until they opened it up and made it into a Wilson Community Center. That's where we all used to go first. Before they came to Wilson, they put a pool there. The city of Newark made a community pool there and then I guess around '75 or '76, they opened up the community center.

BH: We didn't move into town until '79.

CW: That's when I graduated from high school 'cause the pool was put in first, and they used to store the pool stuff in there, inside the building, and then later on they opened the community center. That's where everybody hung out, up on School Hill. That's what we always called it before Wilson.

BH: Was this still open as a school when you were a kid or had it already closed?

CW: No, it was closed, boarded up many, many years. We used to go up there and play on the swings and stuff like that. It was all boarded up, the old school house, and we used to hear stories about there. They used to say there used to be a—I can't think of it—used to say there was a ghost in there. Yes, that's what they said 'cause they said it caught on fire one time and the janitor burned up in there. This a story. I think it was one of them myths. I think that was the story that the old guys made up so us young kids wouldn't go in the building, an old building that was abandoned. [Laughter] One of them type things, I think that's what it, you know.

BH: Yes, the imagination as a watchdog. [Laughter.]

CW: Yes, exactly. Yes, yes, exactly. That's what that was. Exactly. That's what that was. But School Hill, that was a tradition, you had to go up School Hill. If you grew up in Newark, you go up School Hill. That's where you played football, basketball. To have fun, that's where you went.

BH: This was all done on that flat area.

CW: Yes, that flat area, now the parking lot. Now it's a baseball diamond, which is good, but then there's a parking lot too. So I remember when I was like eight, nine years old, the backstop used to be up where I think right now where a trashcan is in the school [inaudible.]. But that's where the backstop was, and I know Mr. Cornish and Charlie Johnson and Archie Albert, they used to play fast pitch softball. You used to sit there and watch them, and then fast pitch kind of faded away. You don't see that anymore, and that was exciting. I remember when fast pitch was like top softball, then slow pitch came in, and these guys, they were doing it now. We were seeing it before it actually become popular. It's a lot of history with a lot of good athletes that really didn't excel from this community. [Phone rings.] I remember there was this one guy used to come to our—when we played Capitol Trail football league—one guy named Mr. Bing Street. He used to dropkick. They said he was the best dropkick football player. He used to come to our practices and dropkick. Show us how to, 'Here's how you kick a field goal, by dropkicking.' You ever see anybody do a dropkick where you hold the ball, you drop it on the ground, and you got to have the right timing to drop it, hit the ground, and kick with your foot.

BH: And this was Bing Street?

CW: Bing Street.

BH: Was he the one that used to dress up as the Easter Bunny?

CW: Yes, walk up down Main Street. Yes, he was one of our biggest supporters. That was the thing. He always would come. We used to, for many years now, which is not there anymore, I went to Central Elementary and Central Middle Schools, now University of Delaware, and we were Capitol Trail Football League used to practice in the back of Central, and he used to come back there, watch us, talk to us, show [inaudible.] dropkick football.

BH: You had a thing about football, you mentioned knee football?

CW: Oh, knee football, yes, yes. That was a game, I don't know where—it's something that we just invented right here on Cleveland Avenue on the corner, and we used to get out there and play knee football in all kinds of weather. Not in the snow, always in the summertime, we used to get out there because there wasn't much on that corner.

BH: It's a little tiny lot.

CW: Yes, yes, so—

BH: Next to a busy street.

CW: Yes, next to a—well most streets weren't that busy then. Streets wasn't that busy then. So that's where we played, right there.

BH: Tell me about knee football.

CW: Well.

BH: It's hard to kick. [Laughter.]

CW: Yes, no kicking never was involved in knee football, it was all done from your knees. Kicking was throwing, that was punting. You threw the ball, and you lined up just like how you play regular football, and you just crawl on your knees, and you tackle, and rolled around, and had fun. I mean, it was fun.

BH: Your mom must have liked your trousers when you got done.

CW: [Laughter.] Oh yes, yes, that was interesting. Didn't matter, we were kids, so we were kids having fun.

BH: So how big was the black community then?

CW: It was a lot of young black kids around there. Back then trick-or-treat, that was the thing you looked forward to every year, going around, going up to Terry Manor, and

going to Miss Mamy James house 'cause she always gave you sticky apples. So you knew you always had to hit Miss Mamy James 'cause she always had the caramel sticky apples. So you knew you always had to there for that, and you could just stay in this one area of the community and get all the trick or treating you wanted. I know now, here in 2004, my wife, she goes out and buy candy and we only get one kid, so that's how much time has changed since then.

BH: Well we live right over on Main Street, and last year we got two kids.

CW: Yes, see.

BH: All the kids are gone.

CW: I mean it's something how much times—I mean we used to, even when I was, we trick-or-treated up 'til what, twelve years old. We still did it at twelve, thirteen, and we were going to football practice in Capitol Trail. We already had our practice uniforms on so we would walk down Barksdale Road 'cause later on, after Central, we moved our practices down to Barksdale Road, so we would walk, that street that goes along the Oaklands dormitories and Nottingham, towards Barksdale, was that--?

BH: That's Old Barksdale.

CW: That's [inaudible.] Barksdale. You cross over the other side? Yes, on Barksdale, and we would walk—we would go through Nottingham with our football helmets as our [inaudible.] and trick or treat, and by the time we get down to Barksdale everybody would be like [inaudible.] It was me, myself, [name] Jones, let's see who else, Danny Patrick, Lloyd Thompson, Aaron Watts, and we and we all played on Capitol Trail. Later on some of them have bikes. We rode our bikes and stuff like that too.

BH: Folks have told me that sports were important to the community.

CW: Oh yes. Oh yes. That was the thing. If you lived in Newark, in the black community in Newark, you had a certain, how you say, to live up to?

BH: You had a reputation?

CW: Yes, you had a reputation to live up to 'cause you figure you had guys like Pedro Swann, Gary Haymen, Sylvester Tucker, David Holmes, there was someone else, [name]. They were outstanding athletes that played at Newark High School. Colly Haymen, I forget about Colly. He was before them, oh man, Kenny Hall, some of the older, older ones. It was a tradition. You had to go out there and at least try and play So that was—and that's the same way you do that for school. That's something I noticed too in the later times, when the kids now are like, you know tradition—you get good grades. That was big when we were growing up. That was like, how do you say, if you didn't walk at graduation time, that was embarrassing, that was a no-no. So that was in the center, the older boys would say, guys would set out there by that the beer garden and them older

guys graduated. So that was a good [inaudible.] I guess you could call it growing up. So that was the incentive to make you do good. On with sports, but also keeping the grades too.

BH: You talk about beer garden and you talk about the tree where people sit and the liquor store, what other, I mean all of this is gone, I think the lodge is about the only thing that's left.

CW: Yes, and also I forgot about where they used to sit before they sit underneath the tree was a rec hall. There was a rec there, and that's where they sold five-cent, ten-cent [inaudible.] My brother used to tell me about in there.

BH: What'd he say about those?

CW: He said he used to have a lot of fun there, and actually Mr. Bell, you go back even further, Jim Bell—used to be a funeral home up on New London Road, on the left hand side, which was no longer there, it was torn down a few years ago. It was the Bell Funeral Home. It's about two doors down from the George Wilson Community Center. It was the Bell Funeral Home. I'm quite sure it was the first black funeral home around this area, and he had a little club there, a bar, that I imagine that this [inaudible.] was called The Wagon Wheel and they used to have nice parties in there for my mom, so you can go back far as that. Called The Wagon Wheel, I remember the name of that.

BH: And when The Wagon Wheel closed they went to the—

CW: Yes, to the little—I don't know the name of that beer garden that was over there and then I just, you know lodges.

BH: Okay so Mr. Bell's was The Wagon Wheel and then this was the beer garden.

CW: I think Mr. Bobby, I think one of the Saunders, I'm not really sure if that beer garden had a name, but I think Mr. Saunders owned it. Bobby Saunders, he lived on the corner, right beyond the corner of, next to St. John's Church, on the other corner across from that. I think he had, I'm not really sure, can't quote me on one I guess you could say, on that one there.

BH: So there were lots of black owned businesses and it was a much bigger community.

CW: Much, much, much bigger. As time progressed and the University grew, the community got smaller, and a lot of the younger ones, I think in my age group, grew up in a different era, where they branched out. People moved out of the community. Many older blacks stayed right here and lived in the community here, but then [inaudible.] all around outside, like Bear, Glasgow.

BH: So they moved to the suburbs along with everybody else.

CW: Yes, the suburbs kind of. Like this was the city and I guess almost like you say New York or somewhere you know, filtered out to the suburbs.

BH: Bigger houses, little more space.

CW: Yes, a little more space, and I think a lot of people, like me living on Ray Street, lot of the older families there, the University was coming in they sold out to the University and just, everybody said well, we don't want to live around college kids. That was the thing. I know Mr. Thompson went through a lot of things with the college kids, and he sold out. That's just how it went.

BH: So when did that all start to happen?

CW: That was in the eighties. I'd say the eighties.

BH: So then when we moved in, on Main Street in the late seventies, the community was still very much there, although you could see it was starting to lose [inaudible.]. And I remember I guess it was Peanut's uncle that had the turkeys. He had the turkeys in his back lot over there.

CW: On—

BH and CW: New London Road.

CW: Mr. Lyle? Mr. Lyle Patrick. Okay, yes, and his Uncle Clissy, Clissy Patrick. Yes, that was something there. It's like living in the city with a little bit of country. That's how it always been, even when the volunteer bussing came through in high school, the kids from Wilmington used to tease about the cornfield behind the goal post, say 'Y'all are farmers.'

BH: Actually what I was about to ask was—you grew up in the sixties and seventies, so you grew up and went to school during the civil rights movement.

CW: Yes, I was there when the volunteer bussing came through.

BH: What was that like for the community? How did it change the community?

CW: It was kind of awkward 'cause it was like a lot of people didn't want, it's not that they didn't want everybody to have fair education or anything like that, but it was just always felt that you go where you're comfortable. If it ain't broke why fix it? I don't know. I never understood that whole era, I never understood that whole era there. I kind of it's like always been [inaudible.] I can't touch.

BH: Well let's touch something else. We talked about the businesses and the beer gardens, but you haven't said a word about the churches.

CW: Oh the churches. That was something. Yes, you're right. Now that was a thing growing up there. Man, it was nothing like them Sunday school picnics. See that's the thing growing up. Everybody got baptized, Christians or I guess and that was the day everybody, you'd all have to say your piece in church, but the Sunday school picnics, that was it. That was a very big thing growing up, now that diminished. I don't know what happened. I always wondered what happened to that, when the churches stopped that before or after, I don't know, it seemed like after my age group it kind of stopped. You grow up and its seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve years [inaudible.] there. Every summer we would either go in to Hershey Park, Dougherty Park, Atlantic City or Wildwood. Clemington Park, that was one there, Hershey, Wildwood, Atlantic City. Atlantic City still had amusement down there. That was it there. We had the boy scouts too. St. John's, that was the good thing about St. John's, they used to let us have our boy scout meetings. Troop Nine-Seven, couldn't be prouder, if you couldn't hear, you hollered a little bit louder. That was something growing up with that there. That was it 'cause all the older [inaudible.] Gary, and my brother, and all them, and Peanut, all of them were members of Troop Nine-Seven. That was interesting. Our scout master Vance Thorpe, which he's also a member of The Lodge here, and that was fun. That was fun there, going to camps and stuff.

BH: If you have any photographs of your scouts or anything else then we need to get together.

CW: I can look for you. I think I got one 'cause every year we marched in the Memorial Day parade on Main Street. Oh yes, we marched in that parade there. We marched the Memorial Day Parade, but the churches were, despite [inaudible.] a lot of people, we were all pretty good kids because of the type of upbringing, and the churches played a good role in making sure we did the right thing, and they had plenty of things for us to do. I always thought we were spoiled kids actually, because we had a lot of fun. I know we did.

BH: Did you belong to St. John's or Mt. Zion?

CW: Mount Zion. Mount Zion.

BH: The picnics always went away to like the amusement park? The church picnics? So they were basically a—

CW: The Sunday School

BH: Seemed like you would go out of town.

CW: Yes, you would go out of town. You took a bus trip, a school bus, and went up and the biggest thing was, one thing about our community is that we had all the best cooks. All the ladies that lived around here were all good cooks, and that was the thing. Everybody always had their own special dish. So that was the thing, was going to one of them parks, and as soon you get to the park, set your picnic table up and you'd have your

lunch, and then you go ride, ride, ride, and then you go back have a break. That was a lot of fun, doing that there.

BH: So you mentioned the person that made the sticky apples, do you remember other people who made particular dishes stand out after all these years?

CW: That stand out, hmmm. Miss Mamy, she always the one did the sticky apples. One I could always remember, that was it. You had to get there early to get them sticky apples. That was it.

BH: Did your mom have a specialty?

CW: No, my mom just gave out plenty of candy that's all. My mom always gave out—

BH: No, for the picnics. I was trying to think of people—

CW: Oh, oh, deviled eggs!

BH: Oh, really?

CW: Yes, my mom, she made the best deviled eggs, and she was known for the best fried chicken. I always say there was a couple other ones around made fried chicken too, but my mom made the best fried chicken because her fried chicken went and grew, like she was a member of the Lodge here, the daughters. I'm the first male to be a member of the Lodge. It was all my grandmother Ednora Swann was a member of the first, the original, daughters. My mom followed in her footsteps, but my mom's chicken went to here, and she used to run that kitchen in there, and she used to attract people from all around, used to come and get her fried chicken. I mean that was the thing, like the guys worked at Chrysler, some worked at FMC, General Motors, you know those second shift? When they got off, coming through there to the Elks Lodge and get some grub.

BH: So it had like a little restaurant part to it.

CW: Yes.

BH: Was that up here or--?

CW: Where we're sitting. There was a kitchen in there, and there's a dining room right here, and that was it. That was a ritual for them guys when end of the week come, Friday, Saturday, came up here [inaudible.] got off that shift. They used to take orders, delivery orders cause that was a very popular thing. I think later on down the road I think Peanut's aunt started up where my mom left off.

BH: But all that's no more. I'm sad. I'd like it to open up again.

CW: Yes, yes, yes. We're going to get there eventually, you know. We'll get there eventually because like I said my mom didn't have no girls, so we're all boys, so she taught us all how to cook. All, me, and my two other brothers, we all know how to cook.

BH: So you have her recipes, then?

CW: Yes.

BH: You know how to make those deviled eggs.

CW: Yes, oh yes, I know how to make deviled eggs, and also she was famous for her potato salad too. She was known for everything. She could make the best potato salad around. That was it, fried chicken and potato salad. You had to get Pearl's fried chicken and potato salad, and that was it, and everybody knew it. She was a very popular lady around here. They always called her Mama Pearl. Everybody called her that, all my friends called her Mom Pearl. She was a warm person, somebody you could talk to, and that was another thing too, a lot of the ones in this community too. No matter, it's like we were all related, and that's a strange [inaudible.] to have in a community. In a lot of other communities you have neighbors, "Hi, I can't say nothing," where here, it was pretty strong, like everybody was related.

BH: So where did you meet your wife? She's from the neighborhood as well?

CW: No actually, [laughs.] my wife's from Middletown. Yes, she's from Middletown. I met her actually through my brother, that's how I met my wife.

BH: Did your brothers marry in the community?

CW: No, he married my wife's sister. [Laughter.] So me and my brother did the—

BH: [Inaudible.] there.

CW: We married two sisters.

BH: That's a great story. Did you do it at the same time? Was it a double ceremony?

CW: No, no, it was later on 'cause my brother's 54.

BH: Tell me a little bit more about the churches. So you had the picnics and--?

CW: Now the churches took turns as far as Sunday School. They took turns, and you'd go to different churches and you'd say a little piece. It was a piece you had to learn of the Bible and you had to memorize it, and then you went to church and said it. They had the dinners, and once again, every church had their dinner, that was the thing. That's how they all supported each other, to keep being able to function and go on.

BH: How about music in the churches? I mean I hear the one. It's a different congregation now, is Pilgrim, but I always go out to hear the—

CW: Yes, well Pilgrim had all the good singers, Pilgrim Baptist. They had the good Yancy singers and they were good.

BH: What singers?

CW: Yancy singers.

BH: Yancy singers?

CW: Yes.

BH: And who were they?

CW: They were members of Pilgrim Baptist. They didn't live in this community. They lived in-- I think they were from, not Iron Hill, but I think they had their own lane, Yancy Lane. I'm not sure what they called the area, it's out there by Pleasant Valley Road.

BH: I know where you are.

CW: In the area out there, where they build the new homes.

BH: Yes, where that big wreck was a few years ago, where all those kids got killed.

CW: Yes, a little further down from there, that next intersection, go to the intersection over, and I think there's a church on that road on the left. Go back over and then they lived over in that area. I don't know what to call that back side of Glasgow or whatever. I always called it Iron Hill myself, but I think it's a little bit past Iron Hill. They belonged to Pilgrim Baptist, and they were the big gospel group in this area.

BW: You talk about the neighborhood as being so tight and I was wondering, did people ever go down to Main Street? Or really did the black community sort of stay to itself?

CW: Pretty much. It pretty much stayed to itself. There was a few that went down to Deer Park and Stone Balloon I guess, but not too much. There was only a few. But you could go if you wanted to because, I know, after you come of age and all, there was a lot of the guys I went to school at Newark went there, and I'd go and hang out with them there and stuff like that. I may have been in my lifetime, been to Stone Balloon maybe about five times.

BH: Well you're ahead of me.

CW: Five times Deer Park. Actually Deer Park, three. Both of them was with a friend of mine that I went to Newark with. I went in there with him because he was going there. It never excited me.

BH: If you could save and share one thing about the community growing up here with the next generation, what would it be?

CW: If I could save.

BH: If there was something you could send into the future to save. This is how it is or how it was.

CW: That's a good one there. The first thing come to my mind would be more what I miss.

BH: Take it anyway you want. You could say what you miss, but—you could do both.

CW: I guess what [inaudible.] when I was younger and my brother and them guys. I would say missing them, all of them being together. I miss that. Seeing my brother and all those guys hanging out together, it was just-- listening to them guys talk, was just-- I don't know how to explain it, it was something nice. It was good. They were talking about sports. Seeing them guys, they would have foot races out here on Cleveland Avenue. I mean they were competing with each other, "Aw, man I'm faster," "No I'm faster than you." "Aw, no." Well one way to prove it, and they'd get out there and they'd get out at that pole right there at Ray Street and they would sprint from that, to this pole in front of the Elks Lodge right here, and they would sprint there. I wonder if that pole's still there. Might not still be there, I don't know. [Inaudible.] And seeing that, it's just something about that competing. I don't know. I miss that bond, that's it, that bond. I would like to get that back because that was a good feeling there. You got a lot of energy from that. A lot of the younger ones today, if they saw that, I think they'd be different. You know how a lot of them kids are, going every which way, going in every which direction. Seeing that [inaudible.] I think that would be a good thing that would change a lot of attitudes in younger ones today. That was a bond there, and I think that's gone now. The community's kind of broke up seem like now. Now, even with-- the churches aren't really full. Members of these churches now are not real members from—there's still a few of the older members that belonged. A lot of the members I see going in there don't even live in Newark, in the black community, right here. I know I see that at Mount Zion and I see that a little bit at St. John's. I don't go there that much, but I see that. Pilgrim I don't see much since they relocated down in way off, astray.

BH: They're way down Barksdale Road.

CW: Yes, Barksdale Road. I can understand they needed more space, but when they were all right here together, it seemed like that force was there working. It made the community smaller.

BH: I think I understand and appreciate what you're saying. I get a picture of people sitting and talking, and generations coming together.

CW: Yes, and all part of that too. Like you don't have the older guys underneath the tree anymore, sitting there playing cards, talking about whatever, life, good things they did, good things that could help you be better. That's no more. Even [inaudible.] The only thing that made me think of that is, I work in Elkton, down in Elkton, and I come home and I come in Newark/Elkton Road, Apple Road, to Barksdale Road, come over West Main on the hillside to the light there, I look at the old house I used to live in right there on the corner, but when I come up Cleveland Avenue, as soon as I brake right past Ray Street I still look underneath the tree, and I look over there and I see the picket fences out there and everything, and that's what was different. It's different now. Back then, back in the sixties, part of the early seventies, after work there would be guys sitting underneath that tree there, just when we got off work, ones that are retired sit underneath there, playing cards. You'd stop there for a few minutes before you go home. You'd go home, come back out, until dinner time you'd go on back. There was just something about that, sitting there and listening to the older ones talk, and getting that wisdom.

BH: Well we've covered a lot. Can you think of something that I should've asked that I didn't ask? Is there something I missed? I mean I can always find you again.

CW: Yes. [Laughter.] The only thing I can think of that I've missed is talking about Big Field.

BH: Well tell me about Big Field.

CW: That was oldest thing there. That was also a thing we had on the end of Church Street. That was part of growing up for us too. You know where the University parking lot is at the end of Church Street?

BH: Yes.

CW: That used to be a field. All that was field, grass, all the way down to the railroad tracks, all grass.

BH: And that was called Big Field?

CW: Yes, called Big Field, and that's where you played baseball, football down there too. That was the place to go hang out. We'd walk down. That was the way where we used to walk to go to school. We used to go to Central Elementary and Middle School. That was the thing too, that I mean about the togetherness. When we went to school in the morning and a lot of us, most the ones of my age group, we all met together right out here. We went to school right here on Cleveland Avenue, right here on that corner. Right there where Rose Street is and that pole there. The same spot where we would meet there and go to school. We would come through the parking lot of The Lodge, down back behind The Lodge, through to Mr. Barber used to park his trucks there, through there, through

Big Field, down the railroad tracks, through the University Carpenters, through that area there with the ROTC, through the dorms, I could go on about the frat houses there, come out to Row's Drug Store, famous Row's Drug Store, which is now a bagel shop. Row's Drug Store, very important place. That there, used to have them good stale doughnuts. [Laughter.]

BH: Is that what made it important is the good stale doughnuts?

CW: Yes, you know? And then there was the news stand, that's where you got your bubble gum for school, and then coming home you had the malt shop, and then before that you had a place, a restaurant called Deluxe's.

BH: [Inaudible.]

CW: Right next to the [name] Theater, which is now Grotto Pizza. That was a very important place, Deluxe's was, because when I would get out of school, they had the best French fries, and they had them old booths, the old wooden booths, the high booths, and I used to go in there, stop in there, and get some French fries.

BH: I remember going there for rice pudding.

CW: Yes, yes. They used to have homemade. Oh, you remember a little bit there about Deluxe's [inaudible.]

BH: Well, I know it because it was Leo Leskaris's brother. He lived over there in the big yellow house that John and Carol own with Dr. Mencher and his family ran the Deluxe.

CW: I never really knew who owned it, but we used to go in there and get those French fries, and another one I'll tell you, another little place that was famous, other than the Post House, was New England Pizza.

BH: Was that on Haines Avenue?

CW: Right on Main Street.

BH: On Main Street. Where was it?

CW: On Main Street, you know where Flavor and the Brewery?

BH: Yes.

CW: Right there, it was a house, called New England Pizza "Home of the Grinders".

BH: I've got to flip [the tape] over. Don't go away here, just a second. New England Pizza "Home of the Grinders"?

CW: Home of the grinders. That was it back then, oh man, that was it, and they were open late. That was the thing there because when our parents, if they were out late and come home and that's one thing, parents would make sure you were hungry, you got fed. Nobody never went without eating. No matter whether you were doing good or bad, it was always provided. That's what I'm saying, where the nucleus of family, everybody looked out for each other. We weren't picture perfect, we had our problems too, but you always worked through.

[Tape ends]

[Tape starts mid-sentence]

CW: Klondike Kate's, that used to be a gas stations.

BH: Okay.

CW: That used to be a pink Texaco. Used to be a Texaco gas station, and they had the old pumps that used to sit out there [inaudible.] check on that and see if, right across the street was the [inaudible.] there and they had them hot subs. They had good pizza there too. That was where you go late night. That was it, New England.

BH: For pizza or here for chicken.

CW: Yes, or here for chicken, yes.

BH: Well Clarence, you've succeeded in making me hungry. [Laughter.].

CW: Oh, okay, yes. I mean I know some things, but some things came back. I remembered some things.

BH: Well we're at the very beginning of this project. You're the first person.

CW: Oh, oh, okay.

BH: But you know I live here.

CW: Yes, oh yes.

BH: So I'm going to follow through.

CW: I always see you walking. I always see you walking around. [Inaudible]

BH: I'll be living here.

CW: Yes. That's cool, that's good. See, and that's the thing, I know I didn't touch bases on that. One thing that was different, and I tried to say [inaudible.] but you always be able to get along with everybody. That's one of the special things about us here, we can get

along. I just went to my twenty-fifth class reunion at Newark High School down there at Embassy Suites down on 896 and I had a ball there, and it was only two blacks who showed up. It was me and Paula Jackson, and I had a fabulous time because a lot of the guys that I grew up with played football out of Newark High School. I grew up with them, so we're all like family. You know they live over there, and you over here, but I could go to them anytime and they could come to me anytime, so that's different. You don't get that everywhere.

BH: I hear you.

CW: You don't get that everywhere. I didn't have to worry about nothing, they were like 'Hey what's going on, you know?' because they called me Pepper. My name's Clarence Wigham, but I was called Pepper. That's what they knew me by, and they were happy that I made it through it. I was only the second one that I ever made it to, because I didn't make it to my tenth, I made it to the twentieth, but the twentieth and the twenty-fifth were the only two I ever made it to. That's one thing about here that was very special to me. I mean we could with everyone, whites and blacks mixed. We [inaudible.], but we got along. [Inaudible.]

BH: Good note to end on.

CW: Yes.

BH: Thank you. It was great.

CW: [Laughs.]

[Tape shuts off.]

[Tape starts.]

BH: Are your parents still alive?

CW: My mother passed away in '85. She passed away but my dad's still living. [Name] Wigham, a good man.

BH: And he grew up here?

CW: No, he's from Georgia. He come here from Michigan, Detroit, Michigan. Chrysler sent him here, from Detroit, and he met my mom here.

BH: He must have been part of the big black migration in the thirties and forties.

CW: Yes, when they sent a lot of the Chrysler workers here, that's when he came here and started working at Chrysler.

BH: But he must have gone from Georgia to the North in the forties? Early forties?

CW: Right, yes, to Michigan.

BH: What they called the “farm to factory” movement.

CW: Yes he’s from [city], Georgia. Went from [city], Georgia to Detroit.

BH: Well anyway, how did you get the name ‘Pepper’?

CW: From him. My dad called me ‘Pepper-tone’ because his favorite baseball player was Joe Pepitone, the New York Yankees, outfielder, and he always used to call me “Pepitone,” so when we moved, I lived in Wilmington for a little bit, on Brander Avenue in Wilmington, and I moved back to Newark, and all my friends and everything, they cut it short to ‘Pepper.’ So that’s how I got Pepper.

BH: Nice story.

CW: Yes. Couple people asked me at my class reunion. They were like, ‘[inaudible.] Alright, that’s awesome.’

BH: Well, thanks I really appreciate it.

CW: You’ll have to remember to ask Bubbles about the barbershop.

BH: You were going to tell me about the black barbershop, go ahead.

CW: Mr. Bobby Saunders barbershop right there on New London Road. Right there, about a half a block back from the red light there. Mr. Bobby Saunders. I mean that was the place, that was another popular place. That was where all the blacks come, from Elkton, Maryland. All the blacks from Elkton, Maryland, ones that lived a little bit out suburbs of Newark came to the barbershop here, and that was the thing. Go in there, Mr. Oswald Watson and Mr. Bobby Saunders, they both cut hair in there and that was it. You go in the barbershop there and listen to Mr. Bobby sing. He always had that opera voice. You know that [demonstrates.], and Mr. Oswald, now he was the one that, you never wanted him to cut your hair because he [inaudible.] he would give you the mohawk. One good thing about Mr. Bobby is he always had something for the kids. Whenever you went in there, he always had a jawbreaker or some type of candy. He was another of them ones I was speaking about earlier that gave you some type of guidance, something fun to do so you didn’t get into nothing bad. So you come in there, even if you just hung around in there, and he would have little games in there that we used to go in there and play. He used to have these little pool games, like a pool table, a little square board [inaudible.] everybody would always play checkers. The old guys come in there and play checkers. He got this one game, used to come in there, was like a hockey game, little square. It wasn’t no bigger than this table here.

BH: About three by four?

CW: Yes, and he used to have little pool sticks and you used to have to knock these little round wooden things into the pockets. It was like bumper pool, but it was a little wooden game. I don't know the name of it, but it was a little wooden disc that slid around inside of that, and that was it. That was it. If you didn't even need to get a haircut, you went into Mr. Bobby's barbershop. And he had the old cone light outside. You knew that light was on, you could go in there, if it wasn't nothing but to sit down and talk. He would always be there to talk to, and that was the big thing there. I guess you could say it was an important part of the growing up history, that barber shop.

BH: It was a big part of being here.

CW: Yes, yes, yes, going to Mr. Bobby's barbershop.

BH: So where did girls and women go?

CW: Hmmm. They had Miss Martha's beauty salon at the bottom of New London. That's where they got their hair, Mrs. Martha.

BH: Down near the school.

CW: Oh no, no, no. The beauty salon right there what is now, did the University build or tear it down?

BH: I know where you're talking about, right where they had that maintenance shop.

CW: Where the maintenance shop is?

BH: It was right next to it.

CW: That was Ed Farns Oldsmobile. It was where the maintenance yard is. That was a car dealership, it was now Martin, but I used to call it Ed Farns, and the Oldsmobile right there, right up on top there was a beauty salon and one time Mr. Glen Thompson had another barbershop later on, Mr. Glen Thompson, but for many years Miss Martha, I don't know Miss Martha's last name, but had a beauty salon there, and there was a house out front there that the Thompsons used to rent, out front there, but in the back later on.

BH: I remember that. Now that you make me remember it, I remember it. It had those glass blocks in the front.

CW: Yes, yes, yes, because it sat off the back. There was a house out front, and then off the back was two little—

BH: Back and to the side.

CW: Yes, the side, there was two little rooms there. One was the salon and the other was, Mr. Thompson, later on it was a barbershop in there [inaudible.] Miss Martha, later on she stopped doing hair and went to another profession, working at MBNA or something. I forgot about old Ed Farns Oldsmobile, used to be on the bottom right over from Ford Funeral Home, used to be Robert Jones, I guess. That was the thing too, and Mr. Bernie's I forgot about old Bernie. That was the grocery store produce man, Mr. Bernie, right there at the end of Robert G. Jones, like that little brick sits right there? That was Bernie's market.

BH: Right behind the record store.

CW: Right, that brick.

BH: I always wondered what that was.

CW: That was Bernie's produce. Bernie, guy used to live up here, I think he lived up the here, [inaudible.] Pennsylvania.

BH: Now were these all black businesses?

CW: No, he was white. Bernie was white, but like I said, he got along with everybody, he was just like the blacks here. Everybody always come into his store, he always had little goodies in there. He used to have them, oh what were those things called, you eat with a wooden spoon, it was vanilla and chocolate ice cream?

BH: Oh, the little cups.

CW: Dip cups or whatever you call them, Dixie cups I guess they were called?

BH: Yes.

CW: Yes, he had the Dixie cups, and you always went to get the licorice and all that there, and sugar daddies, and squirrels.

BH: Squirrel nut zippers.

CW: Yes, yes.

BH: [Inaudible.] names.

CW: Old Bernie. I forgot out Bernie. He had produce too, he had produce. Used to have your tomatoes, [inaudible.] farm used to bring produce down there. Old Bernie, Bernie Martin, in that little building right there.

BH: You've made my neighborhood come alive for me.

CW: [Laughs.].

BH: You really have because pieces of it are still there, but you come to it now, and you just would never know.

CW: Yes. I mean that was it, you'd see them nice old 442s at Ed Farns Oldsmobile. It was always lit up. It was lit up there and man they always had that. I remember when the 442 cars come out They had a white and gold one sitting right on the showroom floor just to pick out. Come down there, you could always see nice cars.

BH: Is that where you got your first car?

CW: No, I got my first car in Wilmington. [Laughter.]. There used to be a couple dealerships down there. I remember hearing my brother talk about one called Fader Ford, somewhere down there, Fader Ford. I remember hearing stories about my brother talking about my other brother, him and his buddies, went down and played bumper cars. They went to an amusement park and got overjoyed about bumper cars [Laughs.]. And went down there, I think it was to Fader Ford and got into the fenced in area down there, and were playing bumper cars.

BH: I'm sure there were words about that.

CW: Oh, yes. [Laughter.]. Yes, there sure was, but I mean, nobody ever really got in no real trouble. They were just kids having fun, kind of [inaudible.] fun, but you know.

BH: Well I know we're going to meet and get together again. Actually it would be fun to get together with one of your brothers and have the three of us sit down.

CW: Yes, that would be nice. I could see if I could get a hold of my brother because he could, man he could take you places you wouldn't believe about this community. I mean, he's a history buff. He's a history buff.

BH: Well see if we can't get together. That'd be super.

CW: Well I'll run that by him. I'll run that by. I'll remember, I'll run that by him.

BH: Well we've covered a lot of ground.

[Tape shuts off.].