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School Hill Audio File 00005

School Hill Oral History Collection
Interview of Noah Congo, May 20, 2017
Interviewed by: Chris Kelley
Transcribed by: David Cardillo

[00:00]

Mr. Kelley: This is Chris Kelley. The date is Saturday, May 20th. This is for the New London Road School Hill Community Oral History Project. Could I get you to say your name and spell it for me?

Mr. Congo: My name is Noah Congo. N-O-A-H, Ernest, E-R-N-E-S-T, Congo, C-O-N-G-O.

Mr. Kelly: Excellent. Thank you. Really quick here, before we get into any questions, let's talk a little bit about this photo here in your hand. Or painting. Painting? Photo? It's a photo, right?

Mr. Congo: It's an aerial view.

Mr. Kelley: Okay, okay. So, you were just telling us a little bit about it and comparing it to what Newark looks like today. Could you just take us through it a little bit?

Mr. Congo: I just want to share with you that this is an aerial view of my family's property, Newark, and the Newark community, which was back in the Fifties. And this is the original home of the Congo family, the Bell family, which was the Bell's Funeral Home, the swimming pool, and et cetera. Back in the Fifties, this is the home of the George, excuse me, the Tolsun (phonetic **[01:27]**) family. The Tolsun family. The Earl family. Which was next door. This is currently the parking lot for the New London Community Center. This is the original Wagon Wheel, which was back in the Fifties. The original Wagon Wheel. And this is the home of the Jennings (phonetic **[01:50]**) family. This is an aerial view, if you take a look, this is the car, which tells you the date of the historic of it. And so many athletes trained and grew in this area over here. Whether it was the Haymans (phonetic **[02:07]**), the Tuckers, the Swans, they grew and trained in this area over here. The Tolsuns, the Boteses (phonetic **[02:17]**), so many. I just can name so many of them. But this is the history of it all. This is the swimming pool. And this is where I grew up. I was a baby back at this time. And this is my life and my history that I want to share with the City of Newark and the historic community.

Mr. Kelley: That's awesome. Thank you. It's very obvious that what we're seeing here looks almost nothing like what we see here today.

Mr. Congo: It's not. All of this, all of this surrounding today. If you ride up New London Road, it is the Emily Bell place, which is the new townhouses, condominiums, apartments; all of this is no longer existing. It was from bare ground up to what you see today riding up. But this is the history of what it used to be.

Mr. Kelley: That's awesome. Do you have an exact date?

Mr. Congo: I don't have an exact date. I don't.

Mr. Kelley: Okay.

Mr. Congo: Because I feel as though it was a little bit maybe close to my time of being born that they used to carry me and treat me and nourish me back at the Wagon Wheel when some of the entertainers used to come through and all the people in Newark used to have a great time. And then from there, history grew, and grew and grew and grew.

Mr. Kelley: Excellent. Awesome. We also have a couple other questions if you don't mind me asking them as well. They're not super long.

Mr. Congo: Go ahead.

Mr. Kelley: But, if you want, you're more than welcome to set this guy down. You can hold up the rest of it, but yeah, I don't want to force you to hold on to anything for too long. Okay? Excellent. So, you did kind of just breeze over this, but we are asking everyone their date and place of birth, if you could share that with us.

Mr. Congo: My birth is 1/12/56, and I grew up in Wilmington. I stayed in Wilmington probably for maybe ten to twelve years, and then I moved to Newark to live with my grandparents. And from there, the rest is history.

Mr. Kelley: History indeed. Could you share with us your occupation?

Mr. Congo: My current occupation, I'm a private manager. For thirty-five years, I was self-employed. Contractor. Landscape. Architect. Landscape. Contractor. Remodeling expert. Whatever you need to have. Until today. I'm on the downside of my years, but good years. Great years.

[05:03]

Mr. Kelley: Awesome. All right. So, obviously, we have kind of talked about this a little bit, but I'm asking everyone if they could just share their basic connection to the school and the community.

Mr. Congo: The school's my life. And when you say the school, you mean the George Wilson Center?

Mr. Kelley: Yes, yes.

Mr. Congo: That's my life. I live next door to it. There was one house dividing us. And it's my life. That's all I can say. As I talk now, so many, so many good days. So many good days. So many memorable days. Whether it was man, woman, boy, girl, parties, the George Wilson Center. It was my life, and I'll never ever ever ever forget it, and it got me to where I am today in life. And I'm hurt and sorry that we weren't able to prosper and do more and more and more and grow and grow and grow. But God has a plan for everything. To put me here today. He already has a plan. So, these are memories, and my son came through here. And he was too young to really remember, and I had so many friends, and so many friends, and so many family. I just, I can't even imagine, I can't even, you know, talk about it.

Mr. Kelley: I get it.

Mr. Congo: It's just too much, too long, and good days, bad days, and the memories are just... But anything that I can pass on to anybody else, I'll pass it on and give it to them the best that I can.

Mr. Kelley: That's awesome. So, in that vein, I have been asking everyone and I am curious... What, we have talked about some things, but what would you say stands out most in your mind when you think about this school here and the community surrounding it?

Mr. Congo: I can always say, and I will always say, there's nothing but good and great and growing memories. And I use that term strong, growing, no matter how I wish that it had turned out, and I say turned out as far as there's some very very valuable property that has been utilized by other people, contractors, businesses, and those type things. I truly wish the Newark community, back in the day, whether it was twenty or thirty years ago, could have maintained it. Didn't happen. And it wasn't forced to happen. But you can't take the memories away from us. You can't take the growing away from us. Because so many people from this community has grown to grow other communities. And that's the greatest thing. And we come back and we are still here, and we still love and cherish and embrace each other on a daily, weekly, monthly, yearly, ten-yearly basis. Thank you so much. Basis. And you can never take these things from us. It's forever embedded within us. And I wouldn't even begin to try to say the names that come through here.

But the names of the families and the memories and the historic that they came through here. It's just unbelievable.

Mr. Kelley: Definitely. For sure, I've heard that. That's resonating through all the interviews here today. Another thing I've kind of been asking everyone, when they think about growing up in this community, growing up in the school system here, what do you think it added to your life? What do you think is the most important about growing up in this area, being a part of this community overall?

Mr. Congo: The greatest part, you know, is hard to say. You throw the questions at me, but the greatest part is just the bond. And when I say bond, I'm talking about... You know, we came up in a time that there were fifteen hundred whites at Newark High School and there were thirty-seven to fifty blacks at Newark High School. [10:11] But the bond that we all maintained our bond. And that's not only with the schools but with each other. And we never forgot where we came from. And we embrace each other. And don't get me wrong, there's good days, there's bad days. But the bond there is the greatest, that whenever we get together, we're able to throw it aside and have that camaraderie and know that some of the greatest athletes came through this place. And I had a chance to experience dealing with them and others of my age and culture and it's on and on and on and on. You know, coming up and up and up and up. And it's not only athletic, you know. It's a spiritual, it's a... It's just a bond. It's just humanity. It's growth. You know. Whether it was in Alabama or whether it was in New York or whether it was in Newark, it's a bond. And it's the greatest thing that we can hold on to. That, you know, we support each other through thick and thin. That's what I absorbed the most. And was I born, you know, in the dirt in Newark? No. But I came here. My family was here. But I came here at fifteen or sixteen or thirteen years old, and it's been my home ever since. And I'll never forget. And I've instilled it in my son, who is doing well in his occupation. And as myself and other people my age and their kids are doing well in their occupations. You know, we've used this as a stepping stone to train them and teach them to do better and go and not look back and realize that no matter how much we said, "This is your home," and, "This is your property," and, "This is your roots," and, "This is your ground," go live your life. Go live your life. There's more than just Newark. But we're here for you whenever we need you, or you need us.

Mr. Kelley: Awesome. That's awesome. Thank you so much for that. I have no more questions.

Mr. Congo: And I thank you so much.

(Laughter 13:03)

Mr. Congo: Thank you so much for saying that. And I didn't plan on getting involved in this. I just wanted to bring the picture up for framing for his day, because he's the greatest person in my life. You know? We're itchy and scratchy, you know? Anything he needs, I'm there for him. Other than that, I wouldn't have brought the picture out. Other than that, I wouldn't be talking to you. I stay (unintelligible **13:28**).

Mr. Kelley: Well, awesome. I really appreciate it.

Mr. Congo: Thank you.

Mr. Kelley: If you do have any final thoughts or anything you'd like to add or say in regards to the New London Road School Hill Community, feel free.

Mr. Congo: I'm good at this point. Everything is good, and I'm sure so many people have said things and it's all going to gel together, and I just appreciate all the love and the growth. And I'm not ashamed to say I'm sixty-one now, and from thirteen-, fourteen-, fifteen-years-old, coming to Newark on a permanent basis until today, this is my life and my roots, and I'm proud to say it. I don't care what state I'm in, I have no remorse to say I'm from Newark, Delaware.

Mr. Kelley: Awesome. Thank you so much.

Mr. Congo: All right.

[End 14:32]