

TRANSCRIBING – Mr. James Briscoe & Mr. W. David Riley

KM: This is Katie Mead and Dr. Bernard Demczuk and today is December 5th of 2011 and we are interviewing Mr. James Briscoe and Mr. W. David Riley. I'd like to thank both of you for coming and ask if you had anything to say before we began.

JB: Not really. ...

BD: Any questions, Mr. Riley?

DR: No.

BD: Very good, welcome gentlemen.... I would like to start off by asking you, both of you,...you guys do an annual family reunion on Francis Field every summer for former residents of Foggy Bottom. Could you tell what that's called and what it is?

JB: That's basically called the Old Georgetown-Foggy Bottom Reunion. It's a non-profit in DC and we accept donations and have a family gathering down there every year. I think this is the...what years ago?...

DR: I count '89, that's 22 years and the original one was about '83, more or less. Then we had a committee that formed after that, after Petey died, then they formed a committee and they asked me to come into the committee in 1989. I've been there since. In fact, I'm the only one from that era that's still there. And then, Mr. Briscoe came – what year?

JB: Probably '93 or '92. I think that was the first year we were incorporated – probably '92.

BD: So, you're going well over 20 years now. And tell us why you put together this family –

JB: Well, basically Petey started this –

BD: Petey who?

B: Petey Green, I'm sorry, I forgot we were interviewing! Petey Green started this at the Francis junior high school cafeteria and he wanted to have a reunion for the seniors there and he would have dinner there and once he died – I'm not sure what year he died –

R: 1984.

B: Like you said, a committee got together and decided to continue this Petey Green tradition to have something for the seniors and for the reunion of the old folks who used to live there. When Mr. Riley approached me about joining the committee I was coming to the event and was really happy that they were having something to reunite all the families because the both of us grew up in foggy bottom and we know how close-knit the families were. We talk about that all the time just in general conversation – just this morning, we were talking about, yeah, we were poor but if somebody else had something then we could go to their house – nobody’s doors were locked –

R: Nobody’s doors were locked!

B: Nobody’s doors were locked. IF you were hungry, I don’t know how the other families knew you were broke and hungry, but they would take you in. I always relate that to Hillary Clinton’s statement, it takes a village. WE had a village here in Foggy Bottom – without anybody trying to put it together we had a village here in Foggy Bottom. WE had different age groups and everybody in your age group went to school together and played together and knew each other. I’m sure MR. Riley had the same thing that I had. The people in kindergarten with him – he knows them now. The People in kindergarten with me – I know them now. You know what I mean? I know their families. The R-I-G-H-T [*uncertain of the spelling*] Family for example, if they’re having something, they invite me. Because they’ve known me since their son – one of their many fourteen children – one of them was my age. This went on and on and without cognizance of the fact that this was happening. WE had people who had disagreements but it was still this area.

BD: You had a real community.

B: We had a real community. When he came and asked me – well, him and the committee came and asked me to join because they wanted to do some things that they thought that I could help – you know, like incorporating and doing some other things – this guy right here, MR. Riley Williams, he was the person who convinced me to join the committee. And we joined with the intentions to raise some funds to have this reunion – this was the sole purpose of incorporating, the sole purpose, we had other people on the committee who had other ideas. But you’re always gonna have people with other ideas – to profit from it or whatever. Because this thing was growing – ever year we had more people at Francis. People would leave and go tell folks, hey we’re having a reunion on the third Saturday in July. And since I’ve been there it’s been the third Saturday in July. Regardless of the date.

R: We never know the date.

B: We don’t wanna know the date! It’s always the third Saturday – it doesn’t interfere with a holiday, the Francis people have been very cooperative in allowing us to use the field because school is out, so we decided – the third Saturday in July, it would always be that.

BD: Mr. Riley, what does the family reunion mean for you down here in Foggy Bottom?

R: It means what Petey intended for it to mean, for families to get together – as you know, you’ve been there – you see the young ones and the old ones. That’s been our tradition – the young people follow the old people; that’s why they still have that bond.

BD: Tell us when you were born in Foggy Bottom and where you were born.

R: I was born in January, the 21st, 1945, I was born in a house – 830 New Hampshire Ave – which is still there, it’s on my original birth certificate.

BD: The house is still there?

R: The house is still there. ... Right now, I can see myself growin’ in that house. I know exactly where everything was. We had a three bedroom, and we had a living room, dining room, kitchen, an outdoor water pump, outdoor toilet, and a kerosene lamp, and a potbelly stove.

K: It could be really nice to get a photo of you in front of the house, if that would be okay.

R: Sure. In fact, I was gonna get my daughter to get my original birth certificate and hold it in front of the house and then I’ll knock on it and say this is my house. ...

BD: Mr. Briscoe, tell us about when you were born –

B: I was born August the fourth in 1950. I was born in Georgetown University hospital, my father worked at Georgetown University Hospital, and my mother was fortunate to have me there because my older brother – two years older than me – was born right here at 23rd and H, I don’t have the address, there’s a lot there with GW buses on it now, I remember the house vividly but I don’t remember the address.

BD: 23rd and H?

B: Right, 23rd and H – on H. On the southeast corner –

BD: That’s just one block away!

R: The 2200 block –

K: The 2200 block?

B: Yeah, the 2200 block of H, southeast corner; yeah, I’m pretty sure it was the first house. They used to have row houses there.

BD: Did you know the Florry [*uncertain of spelling*], Canard, and Williams families? That’s in my walking tour.

B: No, I knew the Canure [*uncertain of spelling*] family, that was the closest family to the church – the pastor’s family.

BD: From St. Mary’s church?

B: Yeah, I had cub scouts at St. Mary's Church.

BD: So both of you were born and raised in this neighborhood. Where'd you go to school?

R: I went to Briggs Montgomery then I went to Francis Junior High, Western Senior High, then I had to drop out because I was becoming a parent.

BD: Western Senior High, up in Georgetown. Really? That's where Duke Ellington--

R: Yes.

B: Yeah, Western used to be the main high school for everyone in this area – it used to be a big school before they changed it to Duke Ellington. I was scheduled to go to Western but –

BD: So you didn't go to Stevens or did you?

R: No, I went to Briggs Montgomery.

B: Briggs Montgomery was over for him, but it wasn't over for me because when I started kindergarten I was at Stevens. They closed Briggs Montgomery and –

BD: Then kids would go to Stevens.

B: Yeah, he was trying to figure out when Briggs Montgomery closed – it had to be the late 50s.

R: Late 50s probably.

B: Because I started school in '55 and Briggs Montgomery wasn't available to me. But at that time I was living in Newpont Circle, on Hopkins Street.

BD: So, they closed Briggs Montgomery; did they put the highway through there?

R: Yes, the freeway.

BD: The freeway...and that was in the late '40s?

R: Late '50s, I would say about '57.

BD: Do you recall your parents or neighbors protesting that highway?

R: No, at that time nobody protested anything.

BD: The reason I ask that is because in the 19 – late '50s and early '60s, you know why I 95 stops on Rhode Island Ave, it stops there, but you pick it up all the way out in Maryland and into Baltimore? Well, it stops there because that highway system was going to go right through African American communities of the Ward 5 and 4 and the community actually rose up and stopped that highway system. In fact, the signs at the time were: *No white man's roads through black man's homes*. Those were the protest signs

and there was a very, very strong movement to stop the highway system ruining black communities in DC and it did stop, it did work – but, it didn't work here.

R: It didn't work here. I don't think anybody protested. I mean, I was a kid anyway so I wouldn't really know.

BD: Tell us, Mr. Briscoe, where you went to school.

B: I went to school at Stevens – well, my pre-K, I went to Grimpy, my mother and father divorced by the time I was –

BD: On Vermont?

B: Yeah, on Vermont Ave, that was where I started pre-L, but I wound up my entire elementary at Stevens, once we moved to Hopkins street, then I went to Francis, then I went to Chamberlain Vocational High School instead of Western.

BD: Where was Chamberlain?

B: 14th and Potomac, SE – it used to be a trade school...

[CUTS OUT – Recording Difficulties; Dr. Bernard Demczuk exits interview]

K: So, it's recording, okay, one more time, *[to Mr. Briscoe]* your schooling.

B: Okay, my schooling began at Grimpy elementary, from there I moved to Stevens elementary, from there I moved to Francis junior high school, and to Chamberlain vocational high school. The experience I had in school was most rewarding to me, especially at Stevens and Francis because I was going to school with my community. Everybody in my community who was my age was in the school, especially in Stevens, that was basically everybody in that neighborhood – that was where you went to school in that neighborhood. When I moved to Francis, my environment spread out a little more, we picked up people from other neighborhoods who came to Francis. I got to know folks real well as friends from further north, northwest DC in the 18th and Kalorama area, but it spread a little more than that because Francis had so many grade levels – well, they had three grade levels but they had so many classes in each grade level. So it was a good experience. I decided not to go to Western where most of the folks who left Francis, I decided to go to trade school.

K: Why? What brought you specifically to the trade school instead of Western?

B: It's been my raisin' to work. I always joke that if the Social Security system was right, I should be getting' credit because I've been workin' since I was eight years old. From servin' papers to shovelin' snow – that's how we endured. Everybody contributed, regardless of what you did you may not have contributed everyday or every week or every month but you contributed something. It was bred into me – so I said, well I'm gonna go learn a trade so that way when I finish high school I will be able to earn a little better livin'. But of course the draft changed that for me.

K: When were you drafted?

B: I wasn't drafted – well, I was drafted in 1968 but I decided to volunteer – I volunteered for four years with the air force. Vietnam Air, served time in Southeast Asia, and I'd do it all over again. But the trade that I took in high school really helped me in the military too, because I wound up in electronics in the military. I never had to fight, didn't have to carry a weapon. The training I got in Chamberlin helped me to further myself in electronics in the air force.

K: Were you drafted, Mr. Riley?

R: No, by the time I was eighteen I was a father with three kids.

K: How many children do you have now?

R: Six. Ten grandkids and one great grandkid.

K: Wow, that's a lot of love.

R: And it costs too. In fact, one of my daughters' birthday is today.

K: Happy birthday to her. Well, you had mentioned earlier that you were in cub scouts.

B: Right, at St. Mary's Church. St. Mary's was a big part of the community there too.

R: Yeah, my mother used to make me go to St. Mary's when I was maybe 5 to 8.

B: That was the other thing that held this community together. Every family made their kids go to church. For the first 16 years of my life, I attended Mount Zion in Georgetown and my family was heavily involved in the civic activities and community activities that they did in Georgetown. And his mother made him go to St. Mary's – but I didn't have a choice with cub scouts and boy scouts. You had to have something to do for the kids.

K: What other kind of clubs were there in the neighborhood?

R: In my neighborhood, there weren't really any clubs growin' up.

B: Yeah, there weren't any clubs, I don't think.

K: Well, did you have any sports teams?

R: Sandlot teams, soft ball, foot ball...

B: Yeah, we had sandlot and football — I was tellin' you about the pictures of the Georgetown Eagles, they were before my time, when I was first born when these pictures were taken, but I got them before my father passed. We had teams we played on locally, just local teams, and all of the recreation centers – Francis in particular and rose park in Georgetown, all had recreation centers for the kids, so we had softball, baseball, flag football, and everything like that for each age group which is something that the

city has denied funding for for all the kids now. I always think that the city has taken the funding for the kids in this city back – the things that we had, things that we took for granted, aren't even there anymore. As a long time, lifetime DC resident, I complain to them all the time – you know we don't have the boat regala, you know where you used to go down on the tidal basin and sail the boats that you made at the recreation center for two months, don't have that no more, they don't have the soap box derby – you know, they don't have stuff like that no more. That's why the kids are running around with energy to do other, bad things.

R: Correct. We served papers, played basketball in the playground on afternoons and in summer.

B: It was nothing for me to get up at 4 in the morning to serve the Washington post. And this man here [Riley], he served more papers than anybody –

R: I served 300 papers during the weekdays and 400 on Sundays from 15 to 18. And I also sold papers down in the Department of the Interior and after I finished serving papers and sold papers down there and then in the evening I sold papers at the Interior Department and at the Navy Annex.

B: Being younger than him, I used to say, yeah, I wanna get to the point when I can serve that many papers. I never got there but I had my time. But I had family that lived in Leroy Park and they didn't have the same type of opportunities that we had to get a job servin' papers so they loved to come early to help me – in places like Leroy park they didn't have that. I think with us bein' in close proximity with downtown in FB helped us because a lot of people – that old guy Jim he sold papers down there, I forgot his name, down at the executive building right on 17th for a long time, he used to sell those blossoms from off the magnolia tree because the blossoms from the magnolia tree were smelling so good that you could buy a paper and for a little nickel you could get a blossom. But those were the types of things that you could do to make money. And when it snowed we used to go to the embassy and shovel snow and you could make enough money – you'd have money for the winter, a couple hundred dollars.

R: But even carrying orders at Safeway or shining shoes at the Y or the S.O.

B: Those were definitely two more of the jobs that we could get. Carrying groceries at the Safeway, there was a line of young guys waitin' to carry the bags home for the ladies. There wasn't a lot of vehicle transportation then.

K: What were your favorite jobs or activities when you were young?

R: My favorite jobs were what I just described – shining shoes, carryin' orders at the Safeway, selling papers.

B: There's a special delight in earning money. I'm sure that MR. Riley had the same pleasure I had to come home and say, hey, I made twenty dollars today, and I can help ya'll, I can make my contribution.

R: I made a big contribution throughout my young life because when I was eleven or twelve I started buying my own clothes and I didn't even think my parents were supposed to buy my clothes.

K: When do you first recall seeing something about the neighborhood changing in this other direction?

R: In the '50s. Mr. Riches went in Snows Court and started renovating the houses, then went to I street, then moved on 24th street, and from then on everyone was exiting. I didn't understand it but I understood after I'd grown, that most people didn't own their houses.

B: Most people were renting their houses.

K: So were their houses being bought from them or were rents increasing?

R: Well, basically, I think they were on the verge of condemning them because most of them didn't have any inside plumbing, no electricity – most of them didn't, some were fortunate.

B: Most of the courts didn't have nothing, there had Snows Court and St. Mary's Court, you had different courts then, they were really alleys, that's what they basically were then but they were called alleys now but back then they were called courts, and built mostly for housing only but not for convenience.

R: They were called courts because they were 30 feet wide. When they're 30 feet wide they're known as courts, like where my shop was at first – they called it an alley shop but it's actually Union Court, 932 Union Court, which is right behind my house now.

K: Were parts of your neighborhood or the whole neighborhood integrated while you were growing up?

R: Well, my neighborhood wasn't really integrated, as you can see on that picture there – no white students and – I saw a white student, Carl Board [*uncertain of spelling*], and I used to have to chase him almost – 'cause he called you names, racial names, and run home and I'd wait for him to come back.

B: You still remember the milkshake? [*sound jumbled*]

R: But his brother was just the opposite, his brother, Harvey Board [*uncertain of spelling*], hung with blacks, all his life. He was just the opposite – one was racist and one wasn't. And I remember that, that had to be the mid-'50s, 'cause he was going to Briggs Montgomery, after the *Brown vs. Board of Education* and that was when Briggs Montgomery became integrated. And I can only remember – hell, I can't remember another white student.

B: Integration for me at Stevens, we had integration but I don't think the white kids or the foreign kids lived in our neighborhood. At least I didn't know them – they didn't even live in houses. There were a lot of apartment dwellers that went to Stevens with us too, and a lot of the diplomat's kids went to Stevens with me, but they weren't part of our neighborhood. There wasn't a family that knew – my family probably knew 25 to 30 families that lived in Foggy Bottom. The real question is when did we really start seein' things changin', I can tell you this, most of the people that lived right down here on the water at Foggy Bottom – what we called the Bottom – they didn't move past DuPont Circle. Because, like he [*Riley*] said, the house he was born in – when he moved, he was still in Foggy Bottom.

R: Yeah, cause we moved from 520 24th Street to 802 24th Street, 24th and H, 528 was up at the Watergate, and then we moved to 1021 21st Street across from Stevens.

K: So is that what happened to most families?

R: Most families, yeah.

B: Most families didn't move that far away, that's why everyone continued to be in the same neighborhood. My dad lived at 625 New Hampshire Ave, there was a horse stable there; they lived right next door. My uncle and he grew up together and they used to tease him, they lived right next door to the horse stable [laughs]. And when they moved, they moved out of that house, I think they moved directly to Hopkins Street.

K: How did most people feel or react to this? Were they in favor of moving or were they against it?

R: They didn't want to move but didn't have any choice. If you didn't own it, what could you say?

B: But a lot of people wanted to move too because if you had an outdoor bathroom facility and had to pump your water – literally, had to pump your water! My great-grandmother lived on the corner of 26 and F, where the Watergate is, there's not even a corner there now. When it would rain hard the water would come almost to the first floor, up the porch – I think she died before she moved, but my family never would've moved into that house, you know, because it's goin' to rain. So if we're going to move a little further up, out of the Bottom. You know, I never heard the word *Foggy Bottom*, I knew it was the Foggy Bottom, but at my house they always spoke of *the Bottom*, the Bottom of DC. That's what this was, *the Bottom*. That was the short name for it – the Bottom.

R: Actually that's why we chose the name of Old Georgetown Foggy Bottom, not to leave anybody out. 'Cause they were both considered ... – some people get offended because you don't say Foggy Bottom, "I'm not from Georgetown – I'm from Foggy Bottom." And so the name came up, Old Georgetown Foggy Bottom. So you include everybody.

B: Then you've got other people who say, "Nah, I'm from Georgetown, I ain't from Foggy Bottom." – But it's the same thing to me.

K: So what's the slight either way?

R: Because some of them originally came up from Potomac Street, all up the rear of Georgetown, up across the bridge, and Prospect, and then came down to Foggy Bottom – and that was the conflict, "You're from Georgetown, We're from Foggy Bottom."

B: The other thing too is that Georgetown always considered itself more affluent than Foggy Bottom. See this was the *Bottom* here; that's what they called it! ... It didn't bother me –

R: — Nah, it never bothered me. I mean it's your side and –

B: And I was proud to be down here, I mean, I would go to Georgetown, all the church people lived in the general proximity of the church over there and I didn't know there was an underground railroad stop there, it wasn't important to me, it was more important to my father to make sure that my sister and I went to get an education about religion at that church. 'Cause he did a lot of work buildin' that church back up 'cause when he died they insisted on taking care of everything for him and I appreciated it but I'm sayin' I didn't know anything about it growin' up. And we would play in Georgetown just like we'd play in Foggy Bottom. When we moved to Hopkins Street up near DuPont Circle I would come back down if for nothin' else to go to cub scout meetings and visit my great-grandmother who was livin' during most of my early years and my dad had friends right here on 23rd street and we'd stop right there and socialize – the socializin' was in this community. There weren't any clubs or nothin' to go to, it was just... – I didn't realize what prejudice was until I went into the military. I just ignored that! It wasn't racism that – it wasn't an issue with me until I went in the military. It wasn't!

R: When I first realized racism, is when I played hookie from school one day and had a little small motorcycle and went out in Virginia. And on the way back me and my friend were on the motorcycle and we were goin' to stop at Bob's Big Boys for a sandwich. And who did I see in the Bob's Big Boys, my Western high school assistant principal, Mr. Horn, and he told us: "You have to go around back to place your order." That's the first time I experienced it.

B: First time?

R: And I didn't go around back 'cause I wasn't gonna go around back. That was my first experience – I must have been around 16 or 17.

B: Yeah, I had heard things but that's what kind of community this was – it really shielded a child from the things... You know, when I heard of racism and the things they were doin' to people in the South like in '63, when people came to Washington to march here, the people that lived here were not experiencing the same degree of racism as they were in the South. We had places to go here in this community – now, [Riley] you probably got out this a little more than me, but there was no place down here that I know of that you had to go to the back door or something like that. We had access to different things. I don't know if GW Georgetown—they used to have Hartford Hall up there, near where I lived and people used to invite us in there as kids and were laughin' at us as kids and whatever – it didn't bother me. We just had different experiences. But when they came to march in DC or had people who camped out on the Mall – we were with them but we didn't understand exactly, whole-heartedly the things that you heard, the things that you read about happening but it wasn't happening as bad in this area, in this community. Maybe because most of the folks in the community were black.

K: So it was just so insular that everybody was just a part from that?

B: Yeah.

K: Were you a part of the marches that were going on?

B: Only to get down there and run in the grass. We had parades down there every year. That was a part of the things to do in DC every year – it was nothing for me to go run up and down the monument stairs.

R: Yeah, we ran up and down the monument stairs, go down to the museums on Saturday and Sundays...

B: The museums were like our playground down here. – Well, are you from Texas?

K: I'm from Texas.

B: Well, you bein' from Texas you probably don't have a lot of monuments and museums there –

K: No – Texas doesn't have history. *[laughs]*

B: I always say that people flock here to see the museums but I had this my whole life.

K: It really is amazing – so that's where you spent a lot of your free time?

B: And in the Foggy Bottom, folks that lived here, we're right close to them.

K: Yeah, it's not but a ten minute walk to get over there –

B: Yeah, a short walk and we enjoyed that; we were fortunate to have that.

K: So did you see Dr. King speak on the Mall?

R: I didn't—

B: I didn't see Dr. King speak; I was runnin' in the grass probably. I was thirteen, probably had two or three of my friends with me. Like I said, it wasn't important to me then.

K: Do you know if the rest of your neighborhood or maybe the older members of your neighborhood were getting more involved or how aware they were of what was going on in other parts of the country?

R: No, for the most part, I don't think they were political. They weren't very involved. Basically, they focused on their family. Because they didn't really see what those people really saw down South.

B: Exactly! I believe that. They really didn't.

K: And you had mentioned a little bit earlier that your father – and what was your father's name?

B: His name was James Briscoe also, I'm a junior.

K: Oh, okay! You'd mentioned that he was part of the rebuilding of your local church?

B: Mount Zion United Methodist Church.

K: Okay – how long had your family been in Foggy Bottom?

B: *Oh my gosh* – I don't know.

R: My family's been there ever since I can remember and my oldest brother, he was born in the, I think, in the 2400 block of F Street in the house also. I believe he was.

[Mr. Briscoe's phone interrupted for a moment, music plays for a short while]

K: How long did your family stay in Foggy Bottom or are they still in Foggy Bottom?

R: No, they're not in Foggy Bottom – they stayed back and forth, E Street Bottom, L Street Bottom, eventually they were on Newport Place and that was in '66, as I can remember, '66-'68, I believe. That's as far as I can remember them being in part of what we consider the Georgetown Foggy Bottom. '68.

K: Where have they gone now? Where do you live now?

R: I live at 912 W Street, NW.

B: Still DC, both of us, still DC.

K: Does the rest of your family still live in the general DC area or did they move across...?

R: Well, two of my brothers are passed and two of my sisters are living in DC, one in Virginia, and my brother also lives in DC.

K: And what's his name?

R: James Hers. *[uncertain of spelling]*

K: And what about your family?

B: My family – I have three sisters and two brothers. One of my brothers lives in Virginia, the other one lives in Maryland. I have two sisters that live in DC and one in Maryland. But on my father's side, his father came from St. Mary's County – I don't know which year – but my father was born in 1929 and I'm not sure if he was born in DC but it was close because he went to Briggs Montgomery also, and all of his siblings went to Briggs Montgomery. So they were definitely at 625 near the horse stable *[laughs]* for a long time, I just don't know which year. Now, on my mother's side of the family, my grandfather was the only child, he was born in Rockville, MD, I mean when Rockville was *rural* Maryland. But he was born in 19 – 1910 or something like that. He was in DC in Foggy Bottom when they had a lot of the port activity, the tobacco and everything. He used to tell me about that.

K: What kind of things did he used to tell you about that?

B: I mean like, the gambling and the things that they did – the numbers and things they would do, the bootlegging, to survive. People did that to *survive*.

K: Yeah, especially during the prohibition era.

B: Yeah, they were playin' numbers for like a penny and a dime. And somebody won – would hit the number for a dime and everybody on that block would eat –

R: A dime was 54 dollars –

B: Yeah, like 54 dollars, and everybody on that block, all the families, they would rejoice because such-and-such hit the number for 54 dollars – that means we're goin' to eat meat for a couple of days! And I would be listenin' to these stories and say – "54 dollars? That's ridiculous!"

R: That was a lot of money – up on New Hampshire Ave, I think, rent was like \$28.50 a month.

B: And the kids down there had their struggle but we had a positive struggle --- it wasn't a devastating struggle where everybody left you just devastated. You know? When it comes time to step up, people would step up and help you because they know you would do the same for them. And that just forms a bond between people. I knew people that I could go to their house to eat – blocks away from my house and their mother would insist "You come in here and eat!" She may have already known that we didn't have enough food at my house, she may have already known that, I don't know, but she insisted that you eat before you went home. And I was fine, I'd say, well, okay, what can I eat? You know, I'm not bashful, I'm gonna eat. ... And it just worked like that! It was just amazing to me and you don't realize until you're older, a little smaller that these people were helpin' each other out. And that's what gives me the joy in bringing the families back together just for that one day in July. Sometimes we amaze ourselves, you know, we say: "I think we got a bigger crowd than we ever had!" Nothing pleases me more and I know nothing pleases him [Riley] more than to see people we haven't seen in a long time – it's not a funeral, it's not a bad time, it's a time to...

K: To celebrate.

B: Celebrate.

R: Yeah, that was Peach's motto: We've gotta stop meeting like this. – At films, we gotta stop meetin' like this. And that's what started it, the reunion.

K: So, you both said you weren't very politically active when you were younger, but would you say you were more – you mentioned earlier that you were complaining to people about certain changes in the neighborhood now – so what kind of activist activities are you involved with now?

R: Actually, I'm not involved in any activities other than the reunion every year. For the most part, I'm workin' on my retirement.

K: I can understand that!

B: We definitely don't do anything together politically. I live in Ward 8 and he lives –

R: I live in Ward 1.

B: So, we're friends and we discuss things back and forth, and we try not to miss a fight together – a prize fight – we still talk all the time but it's nothing political. Our major concentration, for the last ten years we've been doin' this reunion thing together and I may not talk to him for a month and a half or something but he knows that I'm gonna be on time to get that done or whatever. But other than that – politically, no we don't do anything, especially not as a group, as us two together, we don't try to involve the corporation in anything but reunion activities. ... But I can't think of anything I would say that I do – except for complain! I will call the city council if I have a legitimate complaint that I want my voice heard but –

K: It's better than keeping quiet.

B: Right. And then I vote – people don't realize how important it is to vote.

R: Yeah, I vote. I try to get my kids to vote, then ones in DC, make sure they vote. Even though I got my feelings about who's in the where – that's where the real organized crime is; my personal feelings are that, when they get in that political office they don't do what they're supposed to do. ...

B: And that's something that – I don't know how much, city-wise, folks were voting when we were growing up down here but its important in DC now to vote. I'm proud to say that – it's important. They had the largest turn out ever for the Obama campaign and I'm hoping that it continues to be the largest. 'Cause votin' is important – that's the only thing the politicians will listen to. That's probably why we lost a lot of different things, a lot of things for the kids in DC because people weren't expressing through the political process – you can complain all you want about but we don't have the fundings for it –

R: They're gonna listen now, these economic hard times are makin' them listen real close because that Occupy Wall Street, Occupy DC, it's spreadin' all over. And its not just hittin' black people, its hittin' white people as well, well-to-do, they're feeling those strains, with the medical bills and all.

B: And in regards to what income levels too – across the board income levels.

R: Foreclosures – poor people, they took advantage of – they cleaned up money, in my opinion – people getting mortgages and couldn't afford it, the house worth \$200,000 and they're givin' you \$300,000 on it. You don't do nothing constructive with the money, now you can't pay your mortgage, you're gonna lose it. We got so many people down and – people I know, Mitchell Field [*name unclear*], paid \$500,000 for their house now, the neighbor bought one down the street for \$350. So what do you do? Stay there or walk away?

K: Well, and you had mentioned that you are working on your retirement – what are you retiring from?

R: I've been in business for myself since 1970. Auto-body repair. But business is so slow now, economic hard times; I'm transitioning because I did invest in some property right in that immediate block. So right now I'm transitioning, I have an LLC company and I'm finishing my first project this year, and I have to rent it out. Two units.

K: That's exciting!

B: He's a DC-er, a landlord.

R: Yeah, and I feel good about it because, like I said earlier to Bernard, I feel like we were like livestock somewhat down there, just moving you to this block and that block. And I said if I ever had a chance I don't have to move, I'm hopin' I can leave a legacy for my kids so they don't have to move. I got a chance to say yes or no. And believe me they've offered me money, up there where I'm at, and I had a chance to say no. And I'm still there. ...

K: So it's gone from renting an apartment there, to owning other property to rent to other people. That's a really cool transition.

R: Yes, it is. That's what I'm doing. 'Cause people aren't spending their money – DC stopped inspections other than emissions. People aren't spending their money and I can't blame 'em, I'm just glad that I'm able to go a different avenue because if I had to depend on workin' on cars, I wouldn't make it. Not now, 'cause I see cars comin' down the street and every three out of four has a dent or something in it but they're not goin' to get it fixed, they're puttin' their money in their pocket to pay a bill and I understand that. That's why I'm not mad, I'm just glad that I'm able to do something different.

K: So what did you begin doing when you came back from Vietnam?

B: I was a bus driver. DC Transit and Metro, when the Metro system first started for four years. Then I went to the Labor Department, well, went to the federal government employment, and then I retired from federal employment 29 years after that. I've been retired since 2004. And I work now part-time, but I enjoy my retirement. I enjoy the fact that I don't have to put up with rush hour traffic every morning, know what I mean?

R: But I've been walking next door, across the street since 1979. I haven't had to use any gas.

B: Yeah, no gas, he walked right there.

R: Across the street, or next door.

...

K: So, you said you're doing something part-time right now?

B: Yeah, I work at the Verizon Center. I check your ticket when you come in and I get to watch the games – the hockey games, basketball games, and the concerts. I get to watch the games free and I get paid; yeah, it doesn't pay any of my bills but it's a lovely job. Keeps my mind sharp. I know a lot of folks – I've made a lot of friends with folks, just seein' them down there all for the games, and I enjoy it. I do. The only job I've ever had where you work when you want to – you don't wanna work the whole month, cross out the whole month! I love this job! It doesn't pay a whole lot, puts a little gas in the car, but it

gives me something to do and like I say, I may work two days a week then one day the next week and three days one week and no days the next week. Keeps the mind sharp.

K: Well, what did your parents do?

B: My father worked in the government also – he passed before he could retire. He had 30 years in the government, worked in the government printing office. My mother worked for the government also. Until she retired – both have passed. But both of them had ties here to DC. My mother was born here in DC, in the house probably on F Street, 26th and F.

K: And what's your mother's name?

B: Gloria Sedgwick. Her and her brothers all grew up in Foggy Bottom. My father and all his siblings grew up in Foggy Bottom.

K: So your parents met in Foggy Bottom?

B: Right.

K: When did they get married?

B: I think 1949 probably. But they divorced about '54, married about 4 years.

K: Okay, and how about your parents, Mr. Riley? What did they do?

R: My father was a truck driver and my mother was a domestic worker.

K: Did they meet in Foggy Bottom?

R: My father was born in Stellar [*spelling uncertain*], VA and my mother was born in Floris, VA, which is now a part of Harrington.

...

B: I know my mother's folks – my mother's mother was from Warrington, VA, and her father was from Rockville, like I was sayin', but they met in DC, probably in the Foggy Bottom area. I don't know when my mother's mother moved to DC, to 26 and F – that was my great grandmother who lived there. I knew both my great grandmother and my great grandfather at 26 and F, before they died. They died probably after I was ten or eleven years old. But I'm lookin' at their faces now, I remember their faces. I didn't know my father's great grandparents – I mean, I didn't know my great grandparents on my father's side. My grandmother was a big part of raising me, my father's mother.

K: So did even your great grandparents live in Foggy Bottom?

B: Yes.

K: Okay, so it goes really far back.

B: Right, right. I just don't know how long, or when they moved there. My great grandmother and great grandfather lived at 26 and F. Right where the Watergate sits now, there's not even a corner there. They used to have the Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind was over there for a long time, on that hill, it used to be a hill, there's not even a hill over there now. ... They've got so many things they've changed you can't even tell what used to be there, you know? ...

K: Did you have a favorite place in the neighborhood that you liked to go or a favorite hang-out where most of the kids went?

B: Most of the kids went to the playgrounds, Francis Junior High. And we used to like to hang-out at GW.

R: Oh yeah, we used to come over here, to the gym over here on 22nd Street –

B: Was it 22nd or 19th?

R: No, it wasn't 22nd, it was 20th, I think. ... We had Francis Recreation Center, Rose Park...

B: We'd go to Francis or Rose Park – Rose Park is right over there right across the bridge over here. Not a whole bunch of places farther than that, just our neighborhood spots, and most of that was daylight activities. We had recreation at Francis Junior High, we had night rec too.

K: Yeah, I was gonna ask you about that because I know that most of the parks, at least in DC and even where I live, is that you really shouldn't go there at night. Was it like that when you were growing up?

B: No, it wasn't like that. I'm gonna tell you another spot – P Street Beach. You ever heard of that? Do you know what P Street Bridge is?

K: No, I haven't –

B: P Street Bridge is about –

R: 23rd and P, right behind Francis...

B: 23rd and P, right behind Francis, Rock Creek runs behind Francis.

R: That's where we used to catch herrin's, snag herrin's.

B: Yeah, we used to fish right there.

K: Really?

B: Yes! You can go to the hardware store and get – you didn't need bait! The herring, they're real bony fish – you get the three-prong hooks and a string and a bamboo pole and put in the water and just pull it and the fish would be right on the hook. ... And that was...

R: Dinner!

B: That was our dinner.

R: And catfish down the river...

B: ... Exactly. ...

R: We were poor but at the time we were as happy as we knew what happy was.

B: And you know, we always do picnics in the park, and I had to explain to the policeman sometime, "This used to be *our* park. You know, Rock Creek Park was part of the Foggy Bottom community. This was *our* park." At least, down there behind Francis, at least that area, but we'd walk through the park, you could walk up to the zoo through Rock Creek Park, like nothing and never touch the street. You wouldn't even have to go on the street and go right up to the zoo. It was no big deal – no dangers walkin' through the park back then.

K: Do you remember when or why it suddenly became not a part of Foggy Bottom anymore?

B: We had people movin' away. In the period between, I left here in like '65, so I would say the period between 1970 and '80, a lot of folks moved out of here. You can look at the Foggy Bottom now – at one time the Foggy Bottom was predominantly black and you can look at it now and see that it's predominantly...

B/K/R: White.

B: Or non-African American, anyway. It's not predominantly white, I would say, it's got other folks here also. I'm just sayin', family-wise, I'm sure that – we couldn't have the same kind of reunion with the people here now. But at one time, you could count the different houses that had anything other than African American.

R: That's where I'm at now. When I first came up there, I opened a shop in 1970; it was all a black neighborhood, 'round the shore area. I'm at the U Street corner and that area. Now, on my block, there are only three black property owners. So, when they start comin' and puttin' them price tags on them houses, the average person can't afford a \$500,000, \$550,000 for a two bedroom house.

K: Right, absolutely. Do you know specifically what it was that began to make that push outward or when that really started happening? Was it in the 1970s?

R: Development started in Foggy Bottom in the '50s.

K: So it just was happening like you were saying before with the condemning of the houses and that kind of thing?

B: They were condemning the houses so they could make more money and build other things there. They wouldn't have been satisfied for them to have rent for \$28.50 when they can tear the house down and build up. GW has really been fortunate – one of the first schools in this city that they have allowed

to buy up so much property. 'Cause I never thought that you all would get St. Mary's Church; that's an old church.

R: You all got St. Mary's Church?

K: Part of it, part of their land. It surprised me when I learned that too.

B: I tell yah how much I used to hang at GW, when I was twelve or thirteen, about the time of the – this is how far away I was removed from the Civil Rights Movement – thirteen, on Saturdays, I was taking acting classes at the church on 19th Street at GW. From students and instructors that worked here at GW. They used to give them for the little African American kids in the neighborhood, and anybody else that wanted to join; they were doin' plays, you know? Somebody asks, where were you in '63 when Dr. King was marchin'? I was in actin' class! Havin' a ball!

K: What kind of plays were you in?

B: Just crazy, short –I'm tryin' to remember, no Shakespeare stuff, because we did stuff where we had to learn different script parts too. You know? One of my experiences down here! I actually loved comin' through here. The football team would always lose. And they would come in and throw all their stuff down and we would gather stuff up, we would have cleats and everything – they would leave stuff for us; they would leave everything except for footballs! I'd say, when are you gonna leave a ball, a real ball? Oh, they would lose all the time though! So GW was really a part of our things to do.

K: Did you ever take any classes like that?

R: No.

B: I think that came from the boy scouts or cub scouts – somebody was helpin' them and said, how would any of you all like to take actin' class? Well, we're not doing anything else, so why not?

K: What do you remember GW looking like or what was their presence in the community like?

R: Well, I never really paid a lot of attention to it. But as they grew, I've seen how they're doing a lot of good things. I like to see young people advancing into the future. You know? And sometimes I read articles in the paper about how they're protesting GW expanding their housing and such...

B: I didn't really pay no attention to it – it was just a school in the community for me, when I was comin' down here on a regular basis. But I was impressed at how fast they were allowed to expand. 'Cause I served papers in this area, you know, not directly in this area but I would come through here. ... I remember one time, you could count the different halls that they had.

R: Right, and parking lots and they had a lot of houses.

B: And I spent a lot of time at Grant School – you know where Grant School is? They used to have a recreation there too.

R: Yeah, when they let us go there. At first we couldn't go, it was all white. ... Except for we'd go in the playground when it was closed, and go stealin' cherries off the cherry tree. *[laughs]* But it was just bein' kids, you know? Nine or ten years old.

K: So what kind of things did you do at the Grant School then, once you were allowed over there?

R: Same kind of things at school, play.

B: Yeah, play and arts and crafts. ... I had a friend of mine who lived down here on 23rd, right around the corner at 23rd, ... we were goin' to Stevens together but he'd say, "Come on, instead of Francis lets go to Grant today!" But they had recreation facilities and arts and crafts at the different schools like that. At Francis, at Grant – they didn't have it at Stevens 'cause they didn't have a space for it. But they had it at Francis for the kids and everybody in the neighborhood, whoever. And they had people from the other neighborhoods – a lot of foreign kids moved up near Dupont Circle before I had moved there, around '65. They were in the schools too.

K: Really?

B: Yeah, people from Indian, Pakistan – I had friends from Pakistan back then, a friend from Jordan. Different people that we met in school, they had moved in the area, their parents come as diplomats or whatever. I don't know what the political situation was but they would move there. I don't think they were **defecting** there but they were movin' there and they had ties to the political situations for their country, you know? There were some at Stevens and Francis too, and probably Western too.

R: In Francis I think we had one student from Thailand and a Spanish girl who was livin' in the embassy. Other than that, I don't think there was passed five people in there who weren't African Americans.

B: Well, I was really amazed when we got African students. I think that was in Francis – African students darker than me and I was sayin', "I ain't never seen no African students! Where are you from in Africa?" They had accents and you could barely understand what they were saying but they were learning. Just part of the experience for me.

K: Were there any major annual events or anything like that? Did everyone celebrate winter holidays together or were there...?

R: Well, our biggest holiday, I think, comin' up, probably would've been the Fourth of July.

B: Yeah, I think you're right, probably the Fourth of July. ... The biggest holiday for me down here, and it wasn't even a holiday, was Halloween.

K: Halloween?

R: Oh yeah, Halloween. Trick or treatin' ... get some goodies... go to Georgetown...

B: And we'd go to Georgetown and get –

R: —money, candy—

B: Money, apples, oranges – it was so great! I mean shoppin’ bags full! And enough for everybody – I mean *plenty*. We’d have candy till February or March – April! Amazing! You could go home and count the apples –

R: Count the money –

B: Count the money you would get – it was just the great time! That was a better holiday than any holiday except for Christmas.

R: Yeah, for Christmas you knew you were going to get a pair of skates to make a skate board. When it started gettin’ bad and very rare, was a bicycle.

B: Yeah, very rare we’d get a bicycle.

R: Very rare, bicycles cost too much.

B: Yeah, I bought skates, those metal skates, take them apart and make a skateboard – and my poor father said, “I can’t believe you took them new skates a part!” – that was the purpose of buyin’ the new skates! Try to make a skateboard – skateboards ... were one of the biggest things for me growin’ up.

R: And don’t forget the wagons with the wooden wheels.

B: And the wagons –

R: The wagon race—

B: When I got my wagon I was just, oh man, that was like the X-Box for me. Yes! ‘Cause you’d need a wagon to serve papers in the first place. Papers were so heavy if you had enough of ‘em, but you still had to get them served to the different households. But if you had a wagon you could pull...

R: I was fortunate, because I had mostly apartment buildings down here in 24th and H, St. Mary’s Court, you know, 24th Street, 23rd Street, and Virginia Avenue, I had mostly apartment buildings.

K: And just to talk a little bit more about the international students that had been in your schools – were there any distinct cultural differences between maybe neighborhoods surrounding the Foggy Bottom neighborhood?

R: No, they weren’t livin’ right there in our neighborhood. Like I said, the Spanish girl, she was livin’ in the embassy and the student from Thailand...I’m not sure where he lived at. It wasn’t in our neighborhood though. He probably came from the embassy too.

B: That’s what I remember. We had a guy who was at Stevens with me from Bulgaria and his father, I’m sure, was the ambassador for Bulgaria – he lived at the embassy. There were no communities established within Foggy Bottom other than African American. The other part of it was transit from the

students at GW that were livin' down here in dorms temporarily – you know how temporary that was – and Georgetown, you know I think that Carton Hall was a part of Georgetown 'cause we had people movin' in and out of there every year. A few families lived – other ethnic groups lived right within our community –

R: Mostly on the – not on the block of 23rd Street, not on the block of New Hampshire Avenue, and that immediate area like way down here, they're up there by Washington Circle – those two blocks I know were white. And there was a white guy, I think he was ex-police, who used to live on 24th and G, that red house up on the corner. ... Other than that, they were in the 2200 block of F Street, 'cause my father lived in 2221...

B: And we knew most of the policemen around here.

K: Was there much of a police presence in the neighborhood?

B: There was always the policeman that walked the beat.

R: Always walkin' the – tryin' to catch somebody doin' something. And they wouldn't really chase you, they'd just point the way to the precinct if you doin' something wrong or he thinks you're doing something wrong.

K: Was it a generally amicable relationship then between the local police and the neighborhood? Was there ever any tension or...?

R: I don't think so. Most of the police knew who was doin' what and certain things happen in the neighborhood, they would go after certain people.

K: So there wasn't a whole lot of crime in the neighborhood you would say?

B: Not a whole lot of crime.

R: Not other than fightin'.

B: Not within this neighborhood, not a whole lot of crime. There weren't a whole lot of banks here, a whole lot of stores or businesses here, so I guess that eliminated the crime that we had.

R: Because the store owners were mostly Jews or Asian and they lived on top of their stores. They didn't have to leave out when they locked their doors, they could just go upstairs.

B: They knew everybody in the neighborhood – everybody in the neighborhood had a tab.

R: I worked at Vick's, which was right on the corner, on New Hampshire and I, and I was about six or seven workin' for him for three dollars a week and I was spendin' the money back in the store on candy and cakes and stuff, and sodas. And the week that my momma decided she was gonna buy some tennis shoes with my money, he got attitude because I didn't spend it back in his store. 'Cause I was just working for candy and sodas, basically, and when I didn't spend it – he gave me the three dollars, but he

knew he was gonna keep it, it was comin' right back in the store, but that week it didn't come back in the store, it went on my feet! And he got mad.

K: So then there was a lot of close relationships then between just...every single type of, I guess, network within the neighborhood – between business owners and residents, and I guess there's a lot of trust if everyone is running tabs and things?

R: Well, I found out later that, as I got grown, I discovered why, or I feel like my opinion is why Jews moved into the neighborhood and opened a store is because I realized later on that white people didn't actually like the Jews. And so they came to where the people were most vulnerable -- poor black people and set up their stores and so some of them were accused of weighing their hand along with the meat, runnin' the tab up. So they really weren't doing us no favors – it wasn't up to us who would buy, these ideas are formed later on, but as a kid I thought they were doin' us favors.

K: So were many of the business owners not African American?

B: Oh, most of them weren't! Most of them were Jewish. And this isn't just Foggy Bottom – this is citywide. I found out later that all the neighborhoods that I went to – southwest, southeast, northwest, northeast – they had the same thing. They had a community that everybody knew – everybody went to the same schools, so all the kids knew each other, all the parents – if they didn't work together, they knew each other. And then they had little "Jew Stores" on the corner, they didn't have large grocery stores. And people were runnin' tabs there, the same way – citywide in DC, citywide. So it was easy to transition from one neighborhood to another because it wasn't a whole lot different.

K: Were they pushed from their...were their homes condemned in the same way?

B: Capitol Hill used to be predominantly black.

R: And southwest, most of it.

B: Capitol Hill is the richest part of the city now – and a lot of the blacks owned their homes up there, but they were offered so much – they had paid 8 and 12,000 dollars for a home and so when folks offered them a 150,000 dollars they said: Wow! Now it's worth a half a million or more. So it's... the same thing in Georgetown! A lot of blacks owned their houses ...– that port over there in Georgetown, it wasn't even part of the city, but a lot of blacks... the freed slaves that lived there, they wound up buyin' their own houses 'cause they couldn't move in town, so they wound up ownin' their own houses. But they paid, you know, 4 or 5 thousand dollars for a house back then but that house is probably worth a million dollars now!

R: But you know what, as I discovered, when Joan was goin' to school for a real estate license, before the Civil Rights Act they had it documented and some recorded on deeds not to be sold to anyone of Negro blood. So some of them couldn't buy it, they had to get their boss to buy a house for them and turn it over to them.

B: That's exactly what happened to Frederick Douglass! They wouldn't allow him to buy in Anacostia, he owned a lot of property in Anacostia, but the only way he purchased that was he got his lawyer friend – a guy he went to college with – to purchase it for him.

K: And who was this?

B: Frederick Douglass.

K: Oh! Right, right!

B: Yeah, he owned a lot of property in Anacostia, across the river in southeast Washington. ... And when the people found out that he owned it, they were mad at the people they thought he'd sold it to. And that's the way it was – he knew what the deal was, he was just a little more smarter....

R: But as I got grown that was when I realized – when I say, how come black people didn't buy houses? – because, a lot of them couldn't buy it! It was recorded. And in fact, some of them are still on the recorded, on the deeds, but they can't enforce it. Now, so that was the story of poor black people not ownin' homes.

K: So was there a lot of tension between or maybe not between residents and business owners?

R: Well, we didn't have a lot of business owners or stores. We didn't have any retail stores in Foggy Bottom – cleaners, corner stores, and one of my favorites is GW, getting the nice roast beef sandwiches over here – it's still here! On 20 – 20...

K: Oh, their little deli?

[a bit jumbled] **R:** Mm-hmm.

K: So how far out was the Safeway or grocery stores, and that kind of thing?

R: Safeway was on 20th and Penn, and they had one on 21st and K but they had DGS storedown on 27th and...

B: The DGS stores, the grocery stores were pretty big – they were like a franchise store. But for a long time, and Mr. Riley will tell you this too, we had the best open-air markets...

R: And the K Street market, especially – on 21st and K.

B: Right up from Stevens – oh! People came from all over – from Warrenton and Fairfax to go to that market.

R: Well, you know, my uncles and aunts used to sell Christmas trees and wreaths at the market on Christmas.

K: So what all else was it, was it grocery foods and then clothes and jewelry or...?

B/R: Mostly food. Fresh eggs, live chickens...

B: Rabbits and stuff like that – I mean, it was just an abundance of stuff. That’s what used to amaze me about that, they had stuff that was just so *much*!

R: And they had the number 3 precinct right next to ‘em. Huh? Right next to ‘em – on the other side of ‘em was the precinct.

B: But we had people who came into the neighborhood that drove vegetable trucks into the neighborhood, when I was growin’ up.

R: Oh yes, sellin’ watermelons and vegetables.

B: Yeah, and greens – I remember the ice man!

K: The ice man?

B: Yes, because people didn’t have refrigerators then, they had ice boxes. And I refer to refrigerators now as ice boxes and people laugh at me all the time and say “What you mean, ‘ice box’?” and I say hey, I’m just old. But you had to buy the ice and stick in the box and it’d keep everything cold for you. But the guy, he had an ice wagon, I remember that. They had the guy with the wagon for the truck – the wagon for the coal for the truck. It was an old truck...they used to bring coal because a lot of people had coal stoves. I don’t think a lot of people had wood stoves down here, mainly coal. I know my great grandmother had coal. So, we’d seen a lot in my lifetime, a lot of changes, a lot of growth.

K: Well, what did most of the homes look like? Were they pretty small, did they have similar floor plans, or...?

R: Well, most of them partitioned off, rooms, you know? Small houses, small three bedrooms, most of them were. I mean, in the Foggy Bottom area –

B: Down here, down here.

R: In Georgetown and different places and over here on F Street and 22nd they had bigger homes. And in fact, 23rd Street, the 600 block they were pretty big.

K: Okay, then I wanted to get back before we close or took a break – I wanted to ask you about, you had mentioned your time with the air force and I was wondering if you would expand a little bit on that. And what that experience was like for you and being drafted and that kind of thing.

B: Well, the funny part about it was that when I got in basic training my mother sent me the notice saying that I was being drafted and I said, “They didn’t even know I was in the service!”

K: You were already in the service when they drafted you!

[laughs]

B: Yeah, I was already in the service when they drafted me; that was the funny thing. That's what I remember most – when I got out of basic training, I didn't go directly home, but my mother was sending my mail and keepin' me apprised of what's happenin' around here and said, "You got something from the draft board," I said, "Just send it to me, I don't know what it is." I opened it and it said *you've been drafted into the army* and I said, "Too late! I've already been in the air force for six months!" But the experience was, the experience that I – wouldn't trade for anything. I was only eighteen and had to do a lot of grownin' up. I went to southeast Asia and I trained as a telephone equipment installer and it helped me out quite a bit. I learned a lot – saw a lot of places I would never see just bein' here. It really changed for me because I was intendin' on goin' to work but the draft was so heavy at that time, the draft was so heavy for eighteen – seventeen, eighteen, nineteen year olds, if you weren't workin' or in school, you were goin' be drafted. I remind my son of that now, you don't have that pressure now but there was a lot of pressure on people. Of course, my family couldn't afford to send me to school, so I didn't have a choice it was either go to work to help the family out or I'm gonna get drafted, so when I gotta out of school in June of '68, high school, by September, by the end of summer, I was ready to go. Probably the best thing that happened to me, I think – I got to see Texas!

K: *[laughs]* Oh yeah?

B: I spent my first nine months in Texas.

K: What'd you think of it?

B: I thought the weather was crazy – I was out in San Antonio, Texas, and it was 120 degrees and I've been in some hot days on the Francis field but 120 degrees!

R: Out in that hot, dry heat! We were on a motorcycle trip to Texas and it took us two days to get there on the motorcycle and we stayed there for a week or six days ...

[More Texas talk]

B: ...my first nine months in the military I spent in Texas. Without comin' home, I left San Antonio, basic training, I told 'em I was savin' my leave time for when I finished school. And I think I finally came home in April or May of that year. But I wish my son could've worked in the service, really.

K: What does he do?

B: He's unemployed right now. He lives in Alexandria.

K: Do you have any other children?

B: No, I just have the one son, my one namesake.

K: What about your children? What are they doing right now?

R: ... My oldest daughter, she is a representative for the union for the Safeway, Giant, and Food Lion, I think it is. One of my daughters is a dental assistant, one is a property manager, and one is a supervisor with the employment services. And one is a real estate agent – and also my agent! So I don't have to go downtown to get permission for anything. It's a headache goin' downtown for an old man. So that's what she'd do – go downtown and get any permits I need.

K: Did you all raise your children in Foggy Bottom or near FB – did they spend time here as kids?

R: My youngest kids were born in Foggy Bottom.

B: No, my son was born in Fairfax but, one thing I can say, our kids, as other kids are, they enjoy the reunion every year. Their only tie to Foggy Bottom is their parents, really. They're too young – but we've got a lot of young kids that come every year that look forward to comin' to the Georgetown Reunion. And they've never lived in Georgetown or old Foggy Bottom, you know, and that's what we were hopin' to do also – not only to reunite the families, but reunite the new parts of the families.

R: We'll need somebody to take over when we leave. Tryin' to keep it together – my daughter, she was the DJ for several years, except for this last year, she didn't, but we have it goin' on.

K: So would you say that Foggy Bottom is at least now more of a community than a neighborhood attached to a specific place?

B: Which one? ... The Foggy Bottom now or the Foggy Bottom of the past?

K: That's a good question! I guess the Foggy Bottom now.

B: Well, the Foggy Bottom now, I don't really know what it is except for what I see. I think, really, Foggy Bottom now, if somebody asked me to classify Foggy Bottom now, I would say GW University. 'Cause I think GW has taken over most of Foggy Bottom – and I think it's a good thing!

R: Yeah, it's a good thing.

B: Because at least you all are down here tryin' to preserve -- I'm impressed when I hear that we're trying to preserve the union stuff, the Ben's Chili Bowl stuff, and now you wanna do the same thing for the old community otherwise nobody would remember the old community.

R: Like I heard, I don't know how true it is, but they say they had a slave quarters in the houses right there on K Street and 26th, next to that apartment building, I think, with two houses on the corner.

...

B: If it had continued as it had in the past, a lot of these things would be forgotten. I was talkin' to Bernard when we first met him, that I wanted to try to get him to talk to some of the older folks that we know. ... *[recommendations to speak to older folks such as Ms. Alameda Hanesborough]* ... If my grandfather was here, he could tell you things about Foggy Bottom – oh my gosh! You know, he'd tell

me some things and I'd be like – *You kiddin' me!* My great aunt ... she told me that was all they had to do at one time down here was go to the Georgetown Eagles football games. And she worked in the plant downtown that made ammunition for the war, for World War II, I guess it was, so she was here in this area, her and her mother and sister were in this area in the '30s and my father was born in '29, and probably before him – I don't have the dates but all that information is now gone with them.

K: And that's why we're trying to save as much as possible.

[Riley inquired as to any photographs of some old gas tanks, mentions a neighbor in 828 who has more photographs. General talk of other photographs and people with potentially useful photographs.]

K: Was there anything else that you wanted to share this time around?

...

B: We wanna preserve this information too.

R: Francis is a very important school too 'cause I don't want to see that close. My two youngest aunts had to come from Fairfax, VA, actually from Florris, VA they had to come here to go to Francis 'cause they didn't have a school out there. ... My mother's sisters, they're both passed now, they had to come all the way to DC.

B: That's what we enjoyed here. Desegregation here first, for some reason, before around the country happened, you know?

R: But it was a while before I realized that we weren't allowed to go to RK O'Keefe's Theatre down on 15th and...

B: And the Marri *[jumbled]* corporation had shops down right across from the Watergate, on Virginia Avenue.

R: Where the brewery was down there on 26th Street, I think it was, there was a museum down there, it was a Blue Bell that little shop down there you could go down and get those good milkshakes – it was called Blue Bell.

B: ... My father told me, "Don't ever go in there *[the jumbled shop name]* because I wasn't allowed to go in there before, see, now they're goin' to allow us to go in there." And I said, "Alright, well, I won't go in there just because you said so, I didn't know nothin' about that." It didn't bother me. ...

R: Our favorite spot was the Lighthouse.

K: Where was that?

R: 26th and M – workin' all night, so we were able to kind of hang out at night. Finish servin' papers and whatnot, go to a party and come down to the Lighthouse. That's where the hang out was.

K: So what kind of place was the Lighthouse? Was it a bar?

R: It was a carry-out ... --they had the best fish! And French fries. ...

K: So when do you remember the effects of desegregation really coming into your neighborhood?

R: It was in the '50s.

B: It was shielded from me – it was just normal.

R: 'Cause we didn't really realize what was goin' on at that time. As I got growin', especially in the neighborhood that I'm in now, I've seen it happen. So I know it happened. People come in with money, got the good jobs and education, and the people that's been there all along, if they can't afford to fix their places up, they're offer them a price and they're gonna accept it and run out to Maryland. But not me. In fact, I put my daughter's name on one of the houses for tax purposes ... that's gonna be her house anyway.

...

R: But my neighborhood has changed. It was a hundred percent black where I'm at now and I've been there for 41 years, in the neighborhood, I've been in that neighborhood for 41 years.

B: Yeah, he's right around the block from Ben's Chili Bowl. ... I'm in the southeast area, on the other side, in the old Frederick Douglass area.

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