

Interview with Claude Holbrook

Interviewer: Jane Egnew

September 11, 1974

The date is September 11, 1974. This is an interview with Mr. Claude Holbrook of 1228 E. Sycamore.

Q: First of all, I want to know something about your ancestry. How far back can you trace your family?

A: My mother and my father are as far back as I can go. Now, my mother died when I was – oh, I'd say around three years old; then my father died in 1960, and he was 93.

Q: Where were you born?

A: McLean County, Kentucky, right on the Green River, 1898.

Q: Is that where your parents were born, also?

A: Well, my father was born in Ohio County, somewhere near Hartford, Kentucky. My other – I don't know where she was born, but she was born somewhere in Kentucky.

Q: Do you know what led them to move to the area you were born –

A: No, I do not.

Q: What were their occupations?

A: Well, she was a housewife and he was a laborer.

Q: Can you remember some of the places he worked?

A: Where my father worked?

Q: Yes.

A: On the farm.

Q: Then when did you move to Evansville?

A: I came to Evansville July 27, 1919. I went into the army January 18, 1918, served in France and a portion of Germany, and returned to the United States and was discharged July 12, 1919 in Chillicothe, Ohio, and went back to Livermore, Kentucky and then came to Evansville on July 27, 1919. I've been here ever since.

Q: Do you remember what decisions caused you to move to Evansville?

A: Yes, I came here – my father had a brother that lived here, and he hadn't seen him for over twenty years. I came here with the purpose of trying to locate him. After I did locate him – I came in on a Sunday and got a job on a Monday and remained here.

Q: And you found your father's brother, also?

A: Yes.

Q: Where was he working?

A: At that time, I don't recall just where he was working, but he was living on Division Street, just this side of Kentucky Avenue at that time.

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Q: Were you an only child, or did you have brothers and sisters?

A: No. Well, I'm the oldest child by his first marriage, the only one living by his first marriage. There were two of us by his first marriage. I'm the oldest one living by that wife. Then he married again, and to that union, there were six children, and only one of them that is living. Then by the third one, there were six, and there's four of them living.

Q: Where are your half-brothers and sisters living?

A: Two half-brothers and a sister in Owensboro, Kentucky; I have one half-sister that lives here and one that lives in Chicago.

Q: When did you marry?

A: I married January 15, 1920.

Q: Did your wife live in Evansville, also?

A: No, she was from Owensboro – well, out from Owensboro in Daviess County. Both of us say Owensboro is our home, because we all grew up around there.

Q: How many children do the two of you have?

A: Two.

Q: Are they living in Evansville?

A: None but this one here. My other son's in St. Louis, and my wife's over there now. She just returned from Denver Sunday and she'll be over there in St. Louis now for a couple of weeks. Two children, four grandchildren, and eleven great-grandchildren.

Q: Do you have any religious preferences?

A: No, I was brought up in the Methodist and Baptist Churches. When we married, my wife – she belonged to a Baptist church; I belonged to the Methodist Church, which we both knew, and it was our decision not to try to influence either one to the other church. So after we were married about ten and twelve years, all of a sudden, I decided to join the Baptist Church where we could both be in the same church together. So about 1926 or '27 – somewhere along there; I don't remember just which – I joined the Baptist Church. She had no idea I was going to do it.

Q: What church did you go to?

A: Liberty Baptist Church at Seventh and Oak Streets.

Q: Did you feel that church was active in any social issues, in fights for civil rights?

A: To an extent, yes. As a matter of fact, I believe all the Negro churches in Evansville in some form were involved in civil rights.

Q: Is that the way you think it should be?

A: I think it should be.

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Q: Can you tell me some of the activities they were involved in?

A: In the civil rights?

Q: Yes.

A: Well, in school education and better living conditions, better working conditions, and – well, education in general.

Q: How much education have you had?

A: Eighth grade.

Q: Can you tell me where you went to school?

A: I went to school at Livermore, Kentucky.

Q: And it was segregated?

A: Yes.

Q: Can you tell me some of your memories of going to school there?

A: Well, I was a very bad boy! That's one memory. We had a very fine system there at that time. A lot of times I would have to walk from two to three miles sometimes to school through the snow and the rain, wintertime. I had one of the finest schoolteachers that I – well, all of them were really good, but there was one particular one that I only wish I had been able to master the things that he did. The life that he lived and the teaching that he gave me from that time up until this present day – I think about it. The things I learned in school then – I still got a better education after I went into service and went across overseas into France, Belgium, and Germany, because book education is good, but you must have experience. Of all the book learning that I got, then when I went across the sea, I got the experience, and that was a greater education to me than book learning. We hear people talk about today why don't they hire such-and-such a person. They say they are not qualified. Well, how can they be qualified unless they have experience?

Q: At the time you were going to school, what did you think about it being segregated?

A: We had no faults with it.

Q: Do you feel your education was just as good as what the whites –

A: That's right. Now here's another thing, talking about segregation. This was in Kentucky. We, the Negroes and the white children – we all played together. I worked on a farm with white folks, sat at the tables and ate with them, and slept with them. But still, they said we were segregated.

Q: Then as a child, there was really no problem?

A: No! No problem.

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Q: What occupations have you had throughout your life?

A: I have been a (stationary) farmer and engineer on ... boats on the river. I worked about twelve years as a (stationary) farmer, engineer, repairman for Holt & Brandon Ice Company and Evansville Ice Company, [as a] cement finisher and – let's see, what else? Well, I worked on airplanes at Chrysler; I worked for Chrysler for about ten years at different occupations.

Q: Do you have any strong memories of any of those jobs?

A: Very much.

Q: Could you tell me about some of them?

A: When I first started, I came to Evansville and got a job at the Evansville ice plant. I worked there as – well, we called it then “pulling ice.” Then I went from there into the boiler room as an ash-hauler and worked myself up to a boiler-tender and then into foreman and from a foreman into pipe-fitting and general repair. Through the experience on each one, I worked myself up. That's the same way it was when I went to Chrysler. I went out there as a laborer and worked up to – well, I don't know what you would call it, but we worked building airplanes and then when I left from there, I started into cement finishing. Of course, I had some experience in cement finishing before I came to Evansville, because I worked on the roads in Kentucky, building bridges. When I started cement finishing here, we were getting 65 cents an hour. Some of my first work was where Kenny Kent's garage is there on Second Street now, and then on Fourth and Main where Osco's Drug Company is, and then down among where Montgomery Ward's used to be where the ten-cent store is at Sixth and Main. Where Whirlpool is, when the Republic started building airplanes out there, I put the first floor in for the airplane hangars. I then worked throughout the entire building. I started out at 65 cents an hour, and when I quit cement finishing, I was getting \$1.25 an hour, and today I think it's about \$4.50.

Q: What problems did you have with discrimination?

A: In the work?

Q: Yes.

A: Well, in some cases there was quite a bit of discrimination, and it comes to, I say, leadership. There was a lot of white people that didn't want to work under Negroes, but as long as you were down on the lower level, everybody worked together. Regardless of how well you could do your job, and how little they knew, they were all willing to work with you until they got up. As soon as they got up, they wanted to go on up above you. Of course, you had to remain. I did quite a bit of work for Mead Johnson, when they started rebuilding out at Mead Johnson. I put in a number of filling stations around here, some at Eighth and Canal now – there're two there that I built – at Fulton Avenue and Franklin, at First Avenue and Idlewild, First Avenue and Allen's Lane. There was a number of them. I stayed with that until my legs got so that I just couldn't get up and down.

Q: When was that?

A: The last concrete work I did was about 1941.

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Q: Then after that, you –

A: I went into the factory.

Q: You worked there until you retired? Can you tell me about some of the neighborhoods you've lived in?

A: I lived on John and Governor Streets for about ten years; then I moved over on Indiana, the 1100 block on Indiana. I lived there.

Q: Were those in houses?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you rent them?

A: Yes, about three years; then I went back to Governor Street and stayed there on Governor and John and Governor and Olive until after the tornado hit Griffin down through there about 1925. Then I bought a house on Sycamore, and when the panic hit, I lost that and didn't buy another one until I bought this one in 1944.

Q: When you rented, did you ever have any problems with the landlords?

A: No. As long as you pay your rent, you don't have any problems.

Q: Could you tell me something about the Rosedale area?

A: When I came out here – I believe it was in '29 or '31 – where this church is (I forget the name of it) at Indiana and Fares, that was an old feed mill. Oh, I forget all the old buildings and things that have changed around here, but this Rosedale – well, that section over there was known as Newtonville on that side of Division, it was known as Rosedale from Division Street on back through here. This was Rosedale. Where they got the name Newtonville over there – some colored folks moved in there and most of them were all Newtons, and they nicknamed it Newtonville. One of the women whose father originally lived over there – they now live on Bellemeade – is Mrs. Thelma Rochelle, Dr. Rochelle's wife. I live out there when they were all living there, and I was living in one of their houses at one time. That's where they got Newtonville from, but where the Rosedale came from, I don't know. This was nothing but just a mud street here, and I believe it was along about '30 to '39, somewhere in there, when they put this street in here. I didn't put this street in.

Q: Was the neighborhood integrated when you lived here?

A: No. When I moved out here in '44, it was integrated. There was only one family that lives out here now that originally has been in this vicinity ever since I can remember, and that's a fellow who lives up the street here named Cole, Branch Cole. All of the rest of the other folks who lived here have passed on.

Q: What can you remember about raising your children in this area?

A: My children were practically grown when we moved out here; they went to Lincoln High School and finished high school. My son, he's been at Chrysler now – the one who lives over in St. Louis – about

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twenty-six years, and of course, the one that's here – the one who was in here a while ago – has worked different places; I don't know where all.

Q: What did you think about the education your children got?

A: Good. They got a better education than I did, because they were able to finish high school and I wasn't.

Q: Did it ever bother you that they went to segregated schools?

A: No, it was segregated.

Q: Was there ever a certain time in your life when you first realized that being black meant you were different?

A: Well, yes; yes, there was, because there were so many places by being black that you could not go.

Q: When in your life did you first realize this?

A: Ever since childhood, because many places I went to – say, to buy something and have to stand outside the door. You couldn't go in. Just for the record, in 1969, I went to the American Legion National Convention in New Orleans, and I found it more so then than ever before in my life. In Jacksonville, Tennessee and Jackson, Mississippi – (I forget this other little town where the bus stopped there) – there'd be a cafeteria on this side that says "Colored." You'd go in there, and it was just a little cubbyhole there where you went in. Same thing "Colored Women" restrooms, "Colored Men" restrooms.

Q: What year did you say this was?

A: In Jackson, Mississippi, 1969.

Q: Did people give you a hard time?

A: No, everybody was very nice. When I went to the national convention in Atlanta, I wanted my wife to go. It was quite different then in Atlanta when I went down there in 1970. Anywhere you wanted to go, you went; you could sit anywhere, eat anywhere. That's a wonderful town. Then in '72, when I went to the national convention in Chicago, she happened to be at a meeting when I was elected to go, and when I came out of the meeting, I didn't have a chance to tell her. She said, "I'm going, too!" But I couldn't get her to go down through the South. That's where I wanted to go, and I wanted to go back – I was talking to her last winter about going down there this summer, this spring, especially during the Mardi Gras. [She said] "No!" But she wanted to go to Denver; she went to Denver and had a nice time. I talked to her Monday night; she'd just got back in St. Louis Monday night. She had been in Denver for ten days, and she'll be over in St. Louis Monday night. She had been in Denver for ten days, and she'll be over in St. Louis for ten days or a couple of weeks. As I started to tell you about the American Legion, I've been serving in the American Legion since 1929. When it was first organized, I believe there were fifteen charter members – at that time, you had to have fifteen to get a charter – and I believe there's only three of us living now.

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Q: Is that the oldest (Stone Otis Post 354)?

A: That's the oldest (Stone Otis Post 354).

Q: Would you tell me some more about organizing that?

A: It was organized at Fifth and Chestnut Streets. At that time, [it was in] a building called the Castle Hall and Dr. Raymond King and Dr. Thompson had offices there, and Ernest Tidrington had a little office below. Through the Funkhouser Post, which we say are our godfathers, they organized this. Captain Bill Heiman was the commander out at the post at that time, and he was also the Chief of Police. (Monty Holzman) – he was one of the officers in there – and his wife (Florence) lived right up here at Sycamore and Willow Road. She's in a nursing home now; of course Marty's been dead for quite some time now. Bill Stofleth – Ted Stofleth out here at the stadium, his brother – was in there. We all came together and organized this in 1929, December 18.

Q: Can you remember who the first fifteen members were?

A: Yes, I've got it here. I knew you were going to ask that! I figured it, rather. The first fifteen members were: myself, Claude H. Holbrook; Ivan Smith; Dr. Raymond King; Everett Alzman; Charles Rochelle; Chester Sheets; William Rice; William Stinson; Arthur Yates; William Rogers; Rudolph O'Hara, Dr. (Charles) Wilson; Major Carter; Richard Beams; and Donald E. Fauntleroy. Of those now, myself, Rochelle, and William Rice are the only ones living. That was 1929. I was commander of that post in '31 to '32. I've got the names of every commander from then on down to the present day.

Q: Can you tell me some more about your monthly meetings?

A: We met twice a month, and we had one of the best drum and bugle corps from '34 until about '40 – one of the best drum and bugle corps there was in the state of Indiana.

Q: Were you a member of that?

A: No, I wasn't a member of the drum and bugle corps. They'd go to all the state conventions, and I think we went to one, maybe two, national conventions, but at every state convention, we were there. The Women's Auxiliary, they were organized in 1931; my wife, of course, was one of the charter members of that. I don't just recall how many of them are still living, but there's not but a very few. I've been hospital chairman of the eighth district for the last ten years, then state hospital chairman one year and national one year.

Q: Do you remember what year that was that you were the national chairman?

A: I've been eighth district since 1967. I was elected on the state in 1972 just before the Chicago national convention – I mean on the state – and then in '70 for the state. I've been active up till this past year, and due to bad health and one thing and another, I just had to give it up because I couldn't continue. I've been a member of the Vanderburgh County's Veterans' Council, a commander there; of course, I'm still active in that part. I've got a number of citations and things from the county, city, and state hospitals – like Louisville, the state hospital here, and the hospital in Marion, Illinois.

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Q: Can you tell me some of your duties?

A: I always have to – we have a certain amount of money, around \$1,800, to spend between these three hospitals – here, in Louisville and Marion, Illinois. I would always have to make out the requisition to buy whatever needed to be taken care of, such as canteen books, any kind of concession that they would need and for the program, such as entertainment. I sent my last requisition in about a month ago, and I received my checks. Not being able to go to Louisville, I just mailed them over there. If you don't mind I'll show you some of these citations. This is a commendation: "This certificate is awarded to Claude Holbrook in recognition of his representation of the Eighth District of Indiana for the American Legion, who by his willingness to travel the extra miles from Indiana to the Veterans' Administration Hospital in Marion, Illinois for the benefit of a sick veteran has demonstrated a human care and concern for the hospital, patients, and their families. He has won the admiration of everyone with whom he has come in contact. He serves effectively to unite this hospital with the (veterans) he serves. Given at Marion, Illinois, this 22nd of April 1974, Dr. (Pauline Marah), Director."

Q: That's very nice. What's your next one?

A: This is another one from the Eighth District Department of Indiana. "In recognition of the volunteer service rendered through continued outstanding support of the recreation therapy activities and patient projects."

Q: Could you tell me some of the things you did in recreational therapy?

A: I'd just go through and talk to them, and I carried different gifts to give to them. On nights when we'd have bingo, I'd give them so much money to play bingo. A lot of times, I'd go through and give them a shave, help to bathe them, or something like that.

Q: That's really nice.

A: This one here was a 1973 certificate of appreciation "hereby awarded to Claude Holbrook, this 7th day of October 1971 in careful recognition of your commandership of 1970-71. Frank ... Adjutant, and Thomas Rothschild." He [Rothschild] was the former commander – commander after I was. This one here: "This certificate of appreciation is hereby awarded Claude Holbrook, this 2nd day of December, 1965 in careful recognition of your service as a delegate to the senior citizens."

Q: Can you tell me what you did in that capacity?

A: I have been a member of the senior citizens since it was organized in 1962. I've been chairman of the senior citizens' board since '67 – that's the Lincoln Gardens Senior Citizens. Now, this came through the Vanderburgh County Veterans' Council; I've been on that board since the council started. I've been a delegate from the council to the senior citizens. We both work in conjunction with one another and in order to let one know what the other one is doing; then if there are any needs that the senior citizens want, I report those back to the council, and they make a little donation or something to the senior citizens. This is the last one here – well, not the last one, either – but this one here reads: "This certificate is awarded to Claude Holbrook, American Legion, Eighth District of Indiana, in recognition for volunteer service to Griffin." Now this was awarded at the fortieth anniversary of the hospital at Marion. I happened to be, as they say, one of the distinguished guests there.

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Q: These are really nice.

A: That's just of portion of them.

Q: What kind of activities were you involved in during World War II with the American Legion?

A: During World War II, we didn't have too much activity going on, because there wasn't very many of the older ones. We practically were working, and the young ones hadn't come on. Of course, they had to be in service before they joined the American Legion. We did give out donations and clothing, something to the USO and to the Red Cross, and up until I got a certain age, I was a blood donor for a while. After you get to a certain age, they won't let you give blood.

Q: Can you tell me any other activities throughout the years that ...?

A: No. My other activities all along have just been in the church.

Q: Would you like to tell me about some of your church activities?

A: I've been a choir member, a Sunday School teacher, and adult Bible (plays) teacher, and I've been Sunday School treasurer for I don't know how many years. I've been a deacon in the church since 1949.

Q: Can you tell me some of the various forms of racial prejudice in Evansville that are the most obvious to you? This includes from when you first moved here.

A: When I first moved here, there wasn't – everybody knew, you might say, what they could do and what they couldn't do, and that's where it started and where it ended. Of late years – about three or four years ago, since they had this racial prejudice down through the inner city – that was the most detrimental thing that ever happened to anyone, both white or black.

Q: Do you want to explain that?

A: I don't know if I can exactly explain it. That's when some shooting went on out there, and I think a policeman was shot. I don't recall who shot the policeman, but anyhow, it was quite a racial prejudice there. It just began to build up and build up and build up in the last year or so, there's been all of this rock-throwing and shooting and cutting and so forth out through here. It is very disgusting and very detrimental to both white and black. And then another thing: the policemen are very good, I would say. The most detrimental thing to these folks that do this is when a police arrests them and carries them down – there go these different organizations down there pleading, "Give them a chance! Give them another chance!" Well, it's all right to give them a chance, but when you give them a chance and turn them out, they only get right back into it again. Now, I (fought) the judges in many instances by listening to the various groups' preachers and other organizations. A lot of their destruction is really pathetic. A woman can't go out on the streets and walk at night; she can't have a pocketbook in her hand. Snatching pocketbooks, knocking her down and breaking her arms and legs – I just can't understand it.

Q: How do you think these disturbances should be handled?

A: The only way for it to be handled is when these crimes are committed – and I mean crimes – let them pay the consequences, and when they pay the consequences, it's going to have a bearing on the next fellow. I don't believe in this one law for one person and one law for the other one; let it all be the

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same. Just because you've got some money and I don't, I've got to go up and serve time while you've got money to pay it and can get out. Let it be the same for each one, regardless of race, creed, religion, or anything else.

Q: What do you think about local politics?

A: Bad.

Q: Do you want to expound on that?

A: Each organization – well, it may be a good man going in there; he's good when he goes in, no doubt, but after he gets in there, that is where the ship and the breeze begin to turn the other way. Each one wants the strength of attitude that whatever he says, that is what must be done regardless of what the people want. This government was organized for the people and by the people, and not for a clique and by a clique. That is one thing I think is locally hurting the citizens today. Our mayor is trying to take too much authority himself and not listening or trying to put together the needs and thoughts of the citizens. When he wants to hire a certain person of his thinking or he doesn't like him, he fires him. I don't like that.

Q: Do you think local politicians make false promises to black people?

A: Absolutely! Not only to black people, but to white alike. They tell you, "When I get in, I'm going to do this for you; I'll do this." Well, a person with common sense would know that they alone can't do it. They have to have support. Now, your professor sent you out to do a job. You can't do that job unless you get the support of someone else; you've got to have somebody to support you. It's the same thing with politics. If I go into politics, and if I try to get this street repaved and get lights on this street – I can't go out there and say, "So-and-so, put those lights up there." I have got to have the support of the people in this community, and not only these people, but I've got to have support of those in office – the mayor, the city council, the county council, and all the rest of them. Now, I'm not capable of doing it myself; I may tell you, "I'll do this, and I'll do that." You'll know then I'm lying like a pig on the fence.

Q: What do you think of local black politicians?

A: We don't have enough, and then on the other hand, there's too many of them – or some of them – that go into there and are persuaded to act according to the demands of the others. They won't stand up on their own two feet and speak their own minds. We've only got one in there now, and he's on the council; that's John Caldwell. This is his second term in there, and he has stood up for what he thought was right, regardless of who it was, white or black. Regardless of their religion, color, or creed, he stood up for what he felt was right. And that's what it takes. Now, there's another one who works in the Human Relations office. I worked with him when I was on the Community Action Board, and that's Don McNary. There's another man who stands up for what he thinks is right. Those are the kind of politicians that we need, both black and white – not one of those who are wishy-washy and just because I don't agree, says, "Well, you come on over with me."

Q: Can you remember the days of Ernest Tidrington?

A: Yes, I do.

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Q: Would you like to tell me something about that?

A: Ernest Tidrington was a great politician. Now, if he told you when this election came off that this was going to be a Republican mayor, you could go on home and go to bed. When the election was over the next morning, the mayor would be in there. Now, he was a politician. When I first came to Evansville, I went to him. I was trying to get a job at the waterworks. He informed me that he would see that I got in. In the meantime, a man was hauling coal, furnishing coal for the waterworks – Archibald or Archi--?. He got to Bosse – Ben Bosse who was mayor then – before Ernest did and got this man in. There was nothing in the world that Ernest wouldn't do for you. There was the night that he got killed over politics.

Q: Can you tell me about that?

A: I can't say just – well, it was through politics but just in what description, I wouldn't be able to say. The man who killed him killed him there at Governor and Lincoln Avenue with a shotgun. This fellow – when I was a kid and my father put me in this house to live where this family lived, I used to stay with his folks. And this man who killed him was living at this time at Lincoln Avenue and Morton, right next to that cleaning place there – where that vacant lot is, that's where this man lived.

Q: How well did you know him?

A: The man that killed him?

Q: Yes.

A: Ever since I was a little kid.

Q: What did you think when you heard that he had shot Mr. Tidrington?

A: Well, there wasn't much to think, only this man was dead. Of course, now this – well, I won't say that, but there are other things that I know about this particular man.

Q: But you say basically, it was just a fight over politics?

A: Yes, that's what it was, definitely.

Q: What was the reaction of the community?

A: Everybody was very, very much upset. The most detrimental thing was that through politics, the man who'd done the killing – Luther Ball? Said they got paid – got out of it.

Q: Do you think he was paid to kill Mr. Tidrington?

A: I wouldn't comment on it. You know where Key Market is there at Lincoln and where the Dairy Queen is on Lincoln? Well, the brick house right behind this market down on Morton Avenue is where Ernest Tidrington lived.

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Q: Is that the type of political situation you favor for the black community – one strong head with a lot of political power that controls the votes?

A: No, I don't say that one particular one would control the vote. But I do say that there should be one who is strong enough to act as a leader. When it comes to the vote, I believe in this "vote for the man" regardless of the politics. Ever since I've been old enough to vote, I've voted Democratic and I've voted Republican. I look at the man and not at the politics. Some say, "The Republicans did this way, and the Republicans did that way. The Republicans got you out of slavery." The Republicans didn't free Negroes; they freed themselves when they went on the battlefield and began to fight. Abraham Lincoln didn't want to free them. If it had been left up to him, we'd be in slavery today. But he had no other alternative. Well, when I was a child growing up, as I foretold some time ago, my mother died when I was around three years old, and I was shifted as what we would call then from pillar to post. My father was working, and he couldn't take care of us, so I would stay with this person a while and I would stay with that person a while. My father was working twelve hours a day at the sawmill; many days it would be cold and rainy. When I came in from school, I had to sit down there on the porch until my father got home before I could get in the house. Those are things – of course, children today, there are some of them who stay out, but they don't have to stay out in that way and manner. They're out because they're out, and their parents do not try to look after them. But my father tried to do everything that he could. When he remarried in 1910, I stayed home up until I was about fifteen or sixteen years old. Then I left and went to work for myself. In 1918 I went into the service, and this second wife died. When I came back, he had remarried again. This third wife wanted me to stay there. No, I had gotten out and saw that I could make it for myself. On a Sunday – after I came home on a Wednesday – I met the girl that I married, and I came on down –

Q: How old were you when you were married?

A: I was 21; my wife was 20. No, she was 19, because she was born in 1900. I came on down here, and we kept a correspondence. You may think it's a little odd, but I went to see her twice after we got acquainted, and we were married.

Q: So you've been married how many years now?

A: Fifty-four years. It'll be fifty-five years the 20th of next January.

Q: Do you remember what your mother died of?

A: No, I don't.

Q: What has been your feeling about the NAACP?

A: The NAACP has done some wonderful work. It's like any organization; there have been some things I didn't agree with.

Q: Are you a member?

A: Yes. I always have been and always will be.

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Q: Can you think of any other black organization that you think has done as good a job or maybe even better?

A: No, not in the field of education and desegregation or religiously, politically – anything. No other organization that I know of has done the work that the NAACP has.

Q: Are there any things that you think they should be doing that they don't do?

A: Nothing that I can think of, because they are practically involved in everything, even in this housing situation here in town. Now that is a bad thing, but it's all through politics.

Q: Do you think they should be taking this integration stand? -- the Housing Authority in Evansville.

What do you think of that? Was it like the senior citizens?

A: What I think of that is as far as the integration, it's good. But, for instance, you take here in Lincoln Gardens, in the Erie homes – most of those that the housing is putting in there are these that come from the state hospitals and nursing homes. There are some that have moved in there – and then another group that they'll put in there is widows and single women with biracial children. They don't want them in some of these other projects. Now I'll tell you this: I don't care who goes in Lincoln Gardens and the Erie homes – they have a problem, a problem two ways. With those kids out there, you can't say that you say anything to one of them; then you've got the parents on you, and the parents don't care where they go, what they do, when they go, or when they come in. Another disadvantage they have in Lincoln Gardens – I'm telling you this from what I know – is the bedbugs and roaches. It's pitiful. There are some nice, good folks over there, but as far as the housing and taking care of it – they don't do it. You have to do that yourself. Now, you're living here and you try to keep those bugs and things baited out in your house and the others don't – here they come from that house over to you.

Q: So you think it's largely the responsibility of the city to take care of problems such as this?

A: No, it's the problem of the Housing Authority. We have our senior citizens' dinner every Thursday over there in Lincoln Gardens. We don't have any roaches and bugs here, because we have a man who comes in here once every month and takes care of that. I know some folks that used to live across the street over there. They put them out – and you may think this is – I don't know what! But when they put them out, the roaches, bugs, and everything else were running just like – you've seen ants around an ant hole; that's the way those roaches and things were running. I had to get the man out here, and I sprayed all around the edge of my house. I got the man out here, and he drilled holes in the side – walk and all the way around the house and put pressure stuff in there for the two to three hours, the maggots were on top of the cook stove. Now, we can go and take a basket every Thursday over to the center and after dinner, put our baskets down – you know, put our food on the table. And there were times where we'd come back home and bring that basket – dishes, or whatever she has in there – and I'd sit it in there on the table, and sometimes you go over there and raise it up, and there comes a roach out of it.

Q: The center – is that on Canal and –

A: Governor. You can just be sitting in there talking and see them run across the floor. As chairman of the Senior Citizens' Board, I have been on the Urban Renewal? Time and time again, and when Ray

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Anderson, after he went in; just after him – [he said], “Well, we’re going to send somebody over to spray.” What we would do – they didn’t come, so we just took some money out of our little kitty that we have there and bought stuff and tried to bake those things down.

Q: What is your feeling about white people then?

A: My feelings about white people are just practically the same as about most people. There are good ones, and there are bad ones.

Q: Then you think there are some white people that have been particularly helpful to the blacks?

A: That’s right. I’ve got some white friends as good as anybody, some white friends that are better to me than my own supposed-to-be friends.

Q: Can you think of any specific people who have been helpful, you think, in Evansville? Any specific white people?

A: Well, there was one; of course, he’s dead. That’s C.B. Enlow. He was a very helpful man; he’d do anything that he could. Then coming on down, there was Manson Reichert, former mayor; Elmendorf – he was a former mayor. Then you take some of these lawyers here in town now – some of those lawyers you could go to, and if they tell you they’re going to do it, you can just say it’s done.

Q: Who are some of those lawyers?

A: Ted Lockyear, Claude Bates, Bob Hayes, Mrs. Hagedorn – I don’t know whether you know her. Oh, there are just so many of them I just couldn’t begin to name all of them.

Q: Did you ever have any run-ins with the Ku Klux Klan in Evansville? Did you know anythings about them, maybe like in the ‘20’s when you moved to Evansville?

A: Practically nothing; I just knew that they were here. The activities – well, I’ve just seen them, that’s all.

Q: Can you tell me something more about World War I? You mentioned you went to France. Could you tell me something about how long you were in?

A: I was in France from the 14th of April 1918 and left there in June 1919. I don’t recall the date, but we left there, and I landed at New York and went over to Camp Meade, New Jersey, then to Chillicothe, Ohio. That’s where I was discharged – at Chillicothe, Ohio.

Q: Were you in the army?

A: In the army, in the 313th service battalion. I had a fellow call me Monday, I guess it was, and he wanted some information about my service: when I went in service, when I came out, and he wanted to know my serial number. I gave it to him right over the phone. He said, “Are you sure that’s your serial number?” I said, “Yes, it is.” That’s one thing I’ve never forgotten since I came out of service – 2347905.

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Q: What was it like in France? Do you feel that the French treated you better than the white people here did?

A: Yes, definitely. When we got over there, the French began to flock to us, and they had been told that we were some kind of an idiot, a savage – all kinds of names. When we got over there, the people found the kind of people that we were. They were more congenial to us than they were to the white soldiers. I'll tell you the truth: I had some mighty good friends over there. I remember one time when I was at ... France. I was going with a girl there at that time, and she wanted some gasoline. We were sitting in a restaurant, and another girl asked this other white boy about some gasoline to do some cleaning with. He said, "Yes, I'll go and get you some out of the truck." So he went to the truck. (These are troops like these are here out at the National Guard.) At this candle store, he went in and there sat a candle upon the floor. He poured some gas out of a drill in there, spilled some on the floor, and in the meantime knocked that candle over. The thing caught on fire. Well, I went to the side to unfasten the canvas so he could get out, and instead of him coming out, he threw this blazing jug out, and I got burnt. All I had left was the seam of my trousers up through here, and the belt. I just burned all the way up. Speaking of getting burned, in 1923, I was working out here on Columbia Street at Beer Hill's Foundry?. I fell in a ladle of iron out there and was burned from here on up to here. Do you think I haven't been lucky, or fortunate, or what!

Q: Did that require hospitalization for a long period of time?

A: Yes, it did.

Q: How long were you in the hospital?

A: I didn't go to the hospital. I forget the doctor's name, but he had me in a bandage from here on up to here. He wanted to know if I wanted to go to the hospital, and I told him not if I didn't have to. He said, "Is there anybody at home to take care of you?" I said, "Yes, my wife is there." Her mother lived a couple of blocks – her mother and father had moved down here at that time. He said, "OK, we can take you home; I'll be there every day." And he was. All he did was keep that bandage saturated with linseed oil. I don't know whether I can show you some of the scars here. It's just about all gone now, and that was 1923 when that happened.

Q: Was your doctor white or black?

A: White.

Q: Did you ever have to be treated in any of the hospitals in Evansville?

A: Yes. Now that's one thing that caused the time I had a back ailment: That started in 1959 when Chrysler left here, but I didn't go to the hospital until 1961. I had three discs taken out of my back and a fusion put in.

Q: Can you tell me anything about the hospitals before they were integrated? Did you ever hear any stories about the basement hospitals? Can you tell me about that?

A: Before St. Mary's moved out where they are now, that's when I had my first back attack. That's when they were out on First Avenue and Columbia; That's where I was – in the basement. At that time,

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you couldn't walk upstairs, and the doctor told me then I'd have to have surgery. But I was afraid, because if you let them operate on your back, you could be paralyzed and not walk the rest of your life. Well, I was afraid. They gave me therapy. Mrs. Kreisle, she was my therapist. She was out here at St. Mary's; I don't know whether she's still working there now or not. A couple of years ago when I was out there I saw her. They had two twelve-pound weights on each foot and then one around my leg. I had to lie so long flat on my back. Mrs. Kreisle would come in and put the heat lamp on my back and massage. I had to lie flat on my back for fourteen days, I believe. Then it went back OK, but the doctor said if it ever came back again, there was nothing else to do but surgery. When it came back, I had to have it. They took three discs out and put a fusion in there; then they took part of my hip-bone out.

Q: What were the conditions like in the basement hospitals?

A: I think there were about three or four beds in a section there. It was just down in the basement; that was all.

Q: It was clean?

A: Oh, it was clean, and the nurses were so nice. It was just the idea you couldn't go above.

Q: But you felt like you got adequate treatment?

A: I got good treatment. I had a friend that was in Walker's Hospital when Walker's was down there at First and Walnut. It was the same thing: we had to go down in the basement.

Q: What was the treatment like there?

A: I just went in there to visit, but they said everything was lovely, just as nice and clean. It's just – well, I don't know how to explain that, but otherwise everything was good. You got good medical treatment, the best medical treatment there was at that time.

Q: Were you treated in any of the French hospitals?

A: No, I just went to the army hospitals. I went there with the measles – no, with the mumps. Then when I got out with the mumps, they needed orderlies in the hospital, and I went and started in as an orderly in the hospital. Then I went from an orderly to a dishwasher in the officers' quarters. Then I worked up from a dishwasher to second cook in the officers' quarters, and then over as a first cook in the nurses' quarters.

Q: Do you have any other memories of France that you'd like to tell me about?

A: No, I think that's about all. It's got a lot of nice, good-looking women.

Q: You told me earlier that you don't really know anything about your ancestors past your parents. Did your parents perhaps ever tell you about any great-grandparents they had or grandparents during slavery?

A: No. I don't know how I came about it, but I received a letter one time from somebody – I don't recall who it was from. They wanted to trace the family tree. Well, I gave them the privilege of going through, because I would have like to have known myself. I don't know what happened to them, but they did say

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through researching that my father's father's folks came from somewhere in Virginia. I never did find out anymore about it.

Q: Do you think black people today get justice in the courts?

A: In some cases, yes, and in some, no. I feel the same way about white folks in that respect. Some get justice and some don't.

Q: Do you have any other memories of your life that you would like to relate?

A: No, none that I can recall, only to say that I've been fortunate in life. I've never been sick once in life; of course, I've been in the hospital with accidents and things, surgery and the like of that, but as far as being sick, only one time in my life – in 1913.

Q: What was wrong with you then?

A: Typhoid fever.

Q: Were you treated at home?

A: Yes.

Q: Did a doctor come to take care of it, or was there any problem getting a doctor to come?

A: None whatever. When I had the typhoid fever, the doctor wouldn't let me eat anything but this broth. And he had them to keep me outdoors as much as possible. Now, the front of our house faced that way; well, in the morning, they'd take me out on the front porch, because a shade was there and it was cool. In the evening, they'd bring me to the back porch. After I began to get better, I wanted something to eat, and my folks wouldn't give me anything to eat. So one Sunday, they had company. They had fried chicken and cabbage and greens and cornbread. So they all went out to the front and were sitting under a tree. I was on the back porch. I had begun to get strength enough that I could get up and walk, and I went to the icebox – one of those old-time refrigerators, you know – and go me a piece of chicken out of there and a piece of cornbread and went back to the bed and ate it. When they got ready to carry me back into the house, I hadn't had the sense to brush the crumbs out of the bed. They looked down and saw those cornbread crumbs in there and wanted to know where I got them. I told them. Oh, my stepmother got so afraid, she didn't know what to do. She had my father go get the doctor. The doctor came and checked me out and said, "That's OK. Fine. Does anything hurt you?" I said, "No, I'm just hungry." He just looked at me and said, "I'll be back in the morning." Sure enough, the next morning he came on back. He said, "Does anything hurt you?" I said, "No, I'm just hungry." He said, "Well, just go on and get yourself something to eat." As soon as I started eating, I couldn't sleep better (?). Some folks say you feed a cold and starve a fever, or something like that. Well, they were starving me! That's the only time I was ever sick in my life.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to say?

A: And last but not least, I've still got all my teeth – 36!

Q: I thank you so much for talking to me.