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DTB 048 Annette Holmes
Down the Bay Oral History Project (DTB), Acc. 757
Interviewed by Kern Jackson on July 13, 2022
1 hour, 23 minute audio recording • 48 page transcript

Abstract: In this recording, Annette Holmes is interviewed by Kern Jackson in Mobile, Alabama. Ms. Holmes grew up Down the Bay, and shares some of her family history in connection to the neighborhood, as well as discussion of food and foodways in the community. Ms. Holmes describes the neighborhood as she remembers it, and talks about roller skating and other community activities. She shares some of her experiences from attending University of South Alabama. She concludes the interview talking about the impacts of urban renewal.

The Down the Bay Oral History Project focuses on the historic Down the Bay neighborhood on the south side of Mobile, Alabama. Led by Drs. Philip Carr and Kern Jackson of the University of South Alabama, in collaboration with the McCall Library, the project took shape in conjunction with archaeological mitigation work for the I-10 bridge expansion. Down the Bay is a historically Black and Creole neighborhood, and a central focus of the project has been to document the constant threat of gentrification and the legacy of urban renewal.

Preface: This is a transcript of an oral history recording archived at the McCall Library of the University of South Alabama. Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word which has been minimally edited for readability.



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DTB 048 Annette Holmes

Interviewed July 13, 2022

This is a verbatim transcript of an oral history interview recording, composed and formatted in accordance with the McCall Library transcription style guide.

Verbatim transcription is a style of representing as closely as possible the exact wording and phrasing of the speakers on the recording, though false starts, repetitious phrases, and other minor edits have been made as needed only for the sake of clarity and readability. Readers of this transcript are strongly encouraged to listen to the recording.

Please note that if any text is **bolded** in the transcript, this indicates uncertainty of either spelling or accuracy of transcription regarding what was said. Italics indicate emphasis, or are applied to titles and similar proper nouns.

This interview was transcribed by:

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DTB 048

Narrator: Annette Holmes

Interviewer: Kern Jackson (with Joseph Jackson)

Date: July 13, 2022

J: Glasses on and I'll know the—.

H: Well, maybe. [Laughter]

J: I'll know the difference.

H: Y'all want some water or anything?

J: No, ma'am. We in good shape. I can't speak for Joseph. Joseph?

JJ: No, thanks.

J: Now, Joseph is actually—oh, I got to turn on the recorder. Here, can you hear me? Yeah, you can hear me. Oh, it already started. Okay, we in good shape, Joseph. It might be an earpiece in the other one.

H: So, what were you saying about Joseph?

J: Joseph is actually from Down the Bay, born and raised, in his 13 years. I'm a transplant—I'm not a transplant, I'm a—yeah, I'm a transplant.

H: So, where Down the Bay, then?

J: Palmetto Street. 555 Palmetto Street, across from where Braziers live?

H: Mhm.

J: Right across the street from them.

JJ: Isn't [inaudible 1:11] to—?

J: To James. Don't open the new one. Just don't worry about it. See, I can tell that it's going, because it's—.

JJ: Yeah.

H: Huh. Well.

J: Yeah, yeah. And Butch, for somebody who doesn't live in Mobile, he sure is involved!

H: Oh, God! Please, yes.

J: You know what I mean? You mind if I move this?

H: No, it's got blankets in it, but you can move it. It's just a little—

J: Okay, I'm just going to sit it right here.

H: Okay. I'm kind of glad I did take a shower, then! [Laughter]

J: I know, right? I'm going to start the—

H: Look, I took off my tank top, put on a nice one.

J: I'm going to start the camera here.

H: Okay.

J: We got two things going here. We got audio, and we got video going.

H: Okay.

J: The audio is sort of a backup to the video.

H: Got you.

J: And let me get my list of questions out. Years ago, I did a project, an oral history project, and I didn't have all this technology. Everything was tape.

H: Oh yeah.

J: And now I've got the technology, and it's a big project. Since May, I guess the second week of May, we've interviewed almost 60 people.

H: That's good.

J: Yeah, it's been amazing. All right, here Butch. He blowing me up. [Laughter] He wants me to interview Gary Cooper.

H: Gary would be interesting.

J: We'll get to that. I already—I interviewed Gary Cooper 30 years ago.

H: Gary's a wealth of information.

J: Yes, he is.

H: I worked for Gary.

J: Did you?

H: At the funeral home. Well actually, he had a limousine service as well, and I managed the limo service. But you know, it wasn't a big thing in Mobile yet.

J: Mmhm, mmhm. But it eventually got—it came on?

H: Yeah, it got a lot more competitive, and actually ended—it folded up.

J: It makes sense because other than funerals, what do you use those vehicles for?

H: Yeah, and it was really more of—there was a few special occasions like weddings, of course, was the main thing. And then the proms, which was more of a nuisance than anything. And Mardi Gras season was just like free enterprise. Everybody would just go down there and give people rides back and forth, so it wasn't really more the bookings, it was just like—. People did book, but in between, you could just take somebody to the hotel or whatever.

J: And they'd pay you?

H: Yeah! I mean, I don't know. I can't imagine what it costs now to rent a limo.

J: Right.

H: Because it was a by-the-hour kind of thing.

J: Yeah. Well first, let me introduce you to the project. So, this is the Down the Bay Project, and we're at Mrs. Annette Holmes's home. And we're—first of all, we're

really grateful for your participation. This interview, along with others, will go into the archives at the University of South Alabama. We're going to have a digital space where they'll be stored, and academic scholars like myself, they'll be able to have this information to use for their investigations and things of that nature. So. But essentially, this project is a small part of a larger project where archaeologists are digging along the Conception Street Corridor all the way up to the cruise terminal. They got like 25 sites where they're doing archaeological digs.

H: Really?

J: Mmhm.

H: Interesting.

J: So, that's going back three, four hundred years, some of those digs. And then there's us, where we're dealing with folks who have living memory, and exploring the memory of folks Down the Bay right now in this time and space. So, that's sort of what's going on with the project. And like I said before, it's funded by ALDOT, who's eventually going to put a new bridge over the bay. And if we could get you just to tell us your name, and tell me who your people are.

H: All right, my name is Annette Holmes, but everybody Down the Bay knows me as Sissy because I have three older brothers. And one of them couldn't pronounce "Annette," had a little trouble with his, you know, articulating words. So my nickname Sissy came about. But I grew up on New Jersey Street in a neighborhood where we had a lot of, as they say, it takes a village; man, we had parents all over the place. My father was a musician, a tailor, and my mother was basically a preschool at-home mother. [Laughter] You know?

J: Mmhm.

H: But it was good time back then, though.

J: Now, what were your parents' names?

H: Margie Holmes and William Holmes.

J: Now, where were they from?

H: My father's family was from New Orleans—originally, I think. And my mom was from—well, she grew up in Pensacola, I think.

J: Really?

H: Yeah.

J: Okay. And what was the address of the homestead where y'all were reared?

H: 805 New Jersey Street.

J: 805.

H: Yep. And it's still there.

J: Right. Right, right, right. What's the name of the boy—I guess he's a man now—who lives there now?

H: Steven.

J: Steven!

H: My nephew.

J: Yeah, I haven't seen Steven in a long time. I remember Steven was this age.

H: Yeah, I'm thinking back now. We're talking about New Jersey Street, and I remember a lot of—I mean, people that have grandchildren now that I was growing up with. Used to beat them up and stuff. [Laughter] Date them.

J: What are your brothers' names?

H: William "Butch" Holmes—everybody knows him as Butch—Frank Holmes, and Harry Holmes.

J: Okay, and so it was the four of y'all?

H: Mmhm.

J: Very good. And you said your father was a musician and a—

H: Tailor.

J: —tailor. Where did he work?

H: Originally, when downtown Mobile was thriving, he worked at Harry's Department Store. It was a men's store. And he met my mother, she was working at Woolworth downtown on Dauphin Street. And that's where they met.

J: Did they ever say—did your mom ever say what brought her from Pensacola to Mobile?

H: Well, I think that her parents had separated, and she came to live with an aunt in Mobile.

J: Did you know your grandparents on both sides?

H: I knew my grandmother on my father's side. Both my grandfathers were deceased when I was born. And my mother—my grandmother on my mother's side lived down in Miami. And, you know, back then, people didn't travel that far. It was—I don't know, I just never met her. And she died when I was probably about eight; seven or eight years old.

J: Mhm. So, what were their names?

H: Rosebud Hafler was my grandmother on my mother's side's name. And Lucille Holmes was my grandmother on my father's side. And my grandfather was Herman Holmes on my father's side. My mother's father was Herman Hafler. Herman Hafler. You've probably talked to people that are related to us. [Laughter]

J: Oh yeah!

H: So it's like, you can find out!

J: Definitely.

H: But we all used to think we were all cousins back then, though, you know?

J: I think there was some truth to that, though.

H: I think so.

J: So, let's talk a little bit about where you and your family would go to shop for groceries. Where did y'all shop for groceries?

H: There were several stores around the area. You know, Naman's Grocery Store was right there on Broad Street within walking distance of our house. And I think that my mother shopped there primarily for the little things that we needed all the time. And then, there was another store here on Broad Street; what was that one? I think it was a—they called it Big D. No, that was on Government. It was a Winn Dixie on Broad Street right there where the Greers is now? And of course, there was all kinds of little corner stores around.

J: Like what?

H: Like Lane's, it was called Lane's. It was on Texas and Broad. And it was the filthiest, junkiest, but anything-you-probably-needed-in-there store—if you could find it. [Laughter] And they sold cigarettes for five cents apiece. I used to go buy them for my brothers. It was just one of those—I mean, I don't think you see them anymore. Maybe out in the country.

J: Mmhm. Like a package store.

H: Well, it was more of a convenience store, but it had—like, I remember seeing, you could buy rafts, floaties for the beach, and rakes, and everything. Just a big attic with all this stuff. And actually, I've since found out that that guy, I think he might've had a little shady operations going on, too. [Laughter]

J: Mmhm.

H: But it was called Lane's.

J: L-A-N—?

H: E-S, I believe. Lane's.

J: Any other stores that you have in your memory from childhood days?

H: As far as groceries and that sort of thing, no. Like, TGNY, which was like another Dollar General store. I know that—I mean, I don't specifically remember, but I know

that the family the Juzangs had a meat—like, a little deli. And I guess people would go there to buy meats and stuff. But.

J: How about vegetables?

H: Vegetables.

J: Like, was there a man on a truck?

H: Was there?

J: I don't know.

H: [Laughter] I'm thinking, like, "Was there?" Because I know that there was—a man would come around selling blocks of ice on the truck, and milk was delivered by bottles. I'm not sure that we got bottles delivered, because it was, you know, probably more expensive, but I know people that did. But no vegetables, I can't remember the vegetables. Of course, for somebody who didn't like to eat them, I probably didn't care. [Laughter]

J: Right. Was there a fish market nearby, or did everybody go fishing?

H: My dad was a fisherman.

J: Oh, okay.

H: So, if there was a fish market, we didn't go there to buy fish. But I think there was several around. And down the street there was the chicken that Mr.—see, it just comes back to me as I talk about it.

J: Yeah, yeah.

H: There was a little store on New Jersey Street that had live chickens. But he also had a little counter where he sold candy and stuff to the kids.

J: What was the name?

H: Mr. Ellis was his name. I remember it was a white building on the corner, and we would go in there to buy cookies and candy and stuff, because you know, they had

the big bins of cookies, so you could go and, believe it or not, get like a penny a cookie or something.

J: Oh, wow.

H: But he would kill chickens. If you go in, you pick out a chicken, he'd go back there and, whatever, ring its neck, and chop it off, and pluck the feathers, and sell you your chicken. And then, at the same time, if you went in there to buy something else, he'd come in and wipe his hands on his apron, and wash his hands, and give you cookies and stuff. But we used to go there as a kid to buy the candy and stuff, but I don't know if we got any chickens there. But they were there.

J: So, did your dad teach y'all how to fish?

H: I went fishing with my dad a lot, yeah. I mean, he was determined to catch fish every time he went fishing. My mother, I think, used to go with him, but then she said he stayed out there too long for her. But he would catch so many fish he would feed the neighborhood. He would give them to everybody in the neighborhood pretty much, and I don't think he ever sold his fish.

J: What did y'all catch?

H: White trout, drum, croaker; anything that you could eat, we kept. But the favorite catch, I think, was white trout, you know?

J: Any—did he ever take you crabbing?

H: We didn't do a lot of crabbing, but he used to go oystering with his fishermen friends over on the bay, Mobile Bay-Tensaw area over there.

J: Mhm. Wait, he had fishermen friends? Talk to me about that.

H: Well, it was just a bunch of guys he used to go fishing with; Mr. Fluker, and **Zanagood**, and—are a few of the names I know that lived around here that he'd go fishing with. And they'd go out and stay all day long. He was off on Mondays, and that was his fishing day. And everybody could have fish on Friday. [Laughter]

J: Mhm, and he taught y'all how to scale them and all that, debone them?

H: Oh, yeah. I mean, my dad—me more so than my brothers, I think, because they were so close in age, and then, you know, he was working. But then when I was around, I was the only one. And so, I hung on my daddy's leg. And I learned how to scale fish. I learned how to do anything, because I—anything that he did, I watched him do it and learned how to do it, pretty much.

J: Did he—the house on—this is off of the topic, but from memory, did he add on to that house himself?

H: He did. I'm not sure what the front was like before, but there's a screened-in porch on the other side, so I'm thinking it was probably a porch all the way across the front? And he wanted to extend the living room out. And mother told this story about him: every week, he would go get just enough wood that he could afford to buy to keep working on this project. And the owner of the store, of the lumber store—it was somewhere on Washington Avenue—asked him what he was doing. And he told him what he was doing, and he said, "Mr. Holmes, this is what I want you to do. I want you to go home, and I want you to figure out exactly what you need, how much you need, and come back and tell me. And I'll sell you all that on time, and let you pay me every week." And he was so excited, and I guess by that happening it became kind of obvious that he was doing something to the house. So of course, the city inspectors came by, told him that he needed to apply for a variance. I wasn't sure what a variance was when I first heard this story, but as a homeowner now and having done work, I kind of have an idea. And know that these things aren't really a lot of money. You can go and get a permit to build, depending on what you're doing. And mom said that he was so upset that he just cried. He just felt like he was just—but it was maybe, like, a dollar and 50 cents or something back then, I don't know. I mean, when I did this addition, it was 15 dollars for this permit, which I estimated the cost to be 1500, or whatever it was. But yeah, he did. He did. He sure did.

J: That's a great story.

H: Yeah, man!

J: Were there particular occasions where people in the neighborhood came together to cook, or cook out?

H: I guess on holidays. I mean, the immediate neighbors—the Anthonys across the street and us—you know, we were just like family. So, on the holidays, everybody

would cook, and it'd just be more like a potluck, yeah. Because neighborhoods were different then, you know?

J: What do you mean?

H: People were closer, and, you know, I've got neighbors on both sides. I know them. But we don't associate with each other—like, invite each other over and stuff. But back then, you know, I could just walk into somebody's house just like I live there, and be welcomed to come in, and they knew me and my mother, and—you know? Just, it seemed different.

J: Your mother: is there one particular meal that you really enjoyed that she made that you would love to have again?

H: You know what? I hate to say it: fried chicken. Well, because she stopped cooking it, back when the word cholesterol came about. [Laughter] She could cook everything, though. My mother, everything she cooked was great. Just a southern cook. And then of course, we know she was famous for her fudge, her candy. She was kind of the neighborhood mother, too, you know? All the kids, we would go over there, she would make us sandwiches and all that. But everybody knew that she could cook. Yeah. She was—one particular meal for me? Unh-uh. I wasn't a very good eater as a kid. I didn't like to eat, but—.

J: Did she pass any of the recipes on to you, or you just picked them up as you got along?

H: Well, I wasn't one to spend time in the kitchen, though. I was a tomboy, so I was out in the street playing with the boys instead of in the kitchen learning how to cook. [Laughter]

J: So, did anybody get her fudge recipe?

H: You know what she used to say, Kern? That it wasn't a recipe; it was on the back of the Hershey's Cocoa can. And she said, "The main ingredient is love." So, you just have to make sure that you're stirring the pot, and she didn't have a thermometer or anything. She used to drop that chocolate into the water and make sure that it was firm, and that's how she knew the fudge was done.

J: Okay. It's on the can.

H: Yeah, she said the recipe was on the can.

J: But that was—yeah, that was what she was known for.

H: Her fudge and her pralines. And honey, I sold a many of them for her.

J: What, where? You mean, she had a little cottage industry, or a little business?

H: No, but later on, when she started selling them for church festivals and stuff.

J: Oh, okay. To help the church.

H: Yeah.

J: What church did y'all go to?

H: Well, Prince of Peace now, but back when I was a kid, there was a church that we went to Down the Bay on—what street is that, Palmetto? No, that's Hamilton Street. What is it? Palmetto. Because that's where Voncille lives.

J: Dearborn and Palmetto or something.

H: Palmetto, yeah.

J: Yeah.

H: St. Peter Claver. And there was a church. St. Peter Claver Church is where I was baptized, and went to St. Peter Claver school until it closed in—while I was in the fifth grade, so what would that be? Like [19]69? Something like that. St. Peter Claver, and—

J: Where'd you go after that?

H: St. Matthew's. Changed my life, though.

J: Why? How so?

H: Because I got to go to school with white kids.

J: So, Peter Claver was segregated.

- H: Well, I mean, it was in the area where, you know, St. Peter Claver was a Black church, similar to Heart of Mary now, and the school was there. Basically, it was the parishioners' kids, more or less, that went there. And no, there were no white kids in attendance. And so, I'm thinking that that was part of the project coming through, urban renewal, that maybe resulted in it closing, because the church was eventually torn down.
- J: What kinds of places were torn down during urban renewal? I mean, it seems that certain places were torn down, and certain places were allowed to stay built up.
- H: Well, I'm not sure how that was decided, because like I said, the church was torn down, the school is still there and still in operation as a business now. I'm not sure what it is. It might be some kind of ministry now. And then certain people, they chose to remodel their houses, and I guess you had the option to move and they would buy your house, which was probably—you know, I'm just going to say, probably not enough money to—. But then, you ended up buying another house, but all in that area east of Washington Avenue, but I don't know about the buildings because there were restaurants, and theaters, and all kinds of things in operation Down the Bay.
- J: What, really?
- H: Oh, yeah! There was a movie theater right there on Dearborn Street; restaurants; nightclubs. [Laughter] They probably needed to go, some of them. But yeah, there were corner neighborhood clubs, and right by my grandmother's house, it wouldn't be uncommon to see somebody staggering down the street at three in the afternoon.
- J: Really? Where'd your grandmother live?
- H: She lived on Dearborn Street between New Jersey and—you know, they've knocked out some of the streets there. But between Texas and New Jersey on Dearborn, there were a couple of clubs: one called the Spider's Inn, and something—it was one on the corner. And then there was one on New Jersey and Dearborn, that the men used to sit and play dominoes and checkers and stuff on the Boulevard, as we called it.
- J: Really?

H: Yeah. Sheila, you need to talk to Sheila. Have you talked to Sheila?

J: I did, but she said she wasn't on that day. She said, "You got to catch me when I'm on."

H: Yeah, because I was thinking Sheila would be a wealth of information.

J: She is, she is.

H: Butch, too. But see, Butch left, so—he was so—.

J: Young.

H: Advanced in age or whatever you want to say. He was gone—I mean, my relationship with Butch is now, because when I was a kid, he was gone. Because, you know, he's 13 years older than I am.

J: Wow.

H: But he always says he doesn't remember because he wasn't here, which is true because he was gone. But man, there was all kinds of things going on down here.

J: What happened at St. Matthew's? You said it changed your life going to school with white children. How so?

H: Well, like I said, most of the people I knew prior to St. Matthew's were people I had grown up with in the neighborhood and so forth, gone to church with. And then going to St. Matthew's, well, I got to meet people that were different from me. Of course, growing up with my complexion, it was kind of—I was different from a lot of people that I grew up with, too, just because of my complexion. You know, I always thought of it as too white to be Black, and too Black to be white; this whole mixed-up, just hard fitting in.

J: Right.

H: So, I went to St. Matthew's in a, you know, primarily white school, and I met whites and became friends with white people. I mean, now I have more white friends just because that was what I was introduced to. And it didn't feel uncomfortable to me because my parents just—that's not the way we were raised, anyway.

- J: I didn't know that St. Matthew's had integrated.
- H: Well, it was—when we went there, because the Wellses and—I mean, that was just where everybody that was going to St. Peter Claver, most of us went there. I guess some people went to Heart of Mary. Some went to, like, Little Flower. But St. Matthew's was right down—I can remember the classrooms.
- J: And Peter Claver and St. Matthew's pretty good instruction?
- H: Yeah. Now, at Peter Claver, it was such a small school that sometimes, like, I remember—now, I'm not saying that I was really smart, but I remember I was taking math with the class ahead of me. Because, I don't know, maybe I was ahead. So, they did kind of condense things for us, I think? Because of just necessity. But yeah, the education was good, and just the exposure to life. Like when I was in the second grade, that's when Martin Luther King was assassinated. And I guess because of my knowledge of that through my education and just through the fact that I had older brothers, I was kind of aware of what was going on. I remember when JFK was assassinated, my mother cried during *As the World Turns*, and that's not something I was used to seeing. I knew something bad had happened. So, I was aware of things. I marched in a demonstration when I was seven years old, after Martin Luther King was assassinated, with my second-grade teacher and the preacher from our school, our church, down what is now Martin Luther King Avenue. But it was a demonstration from some point on what was Davis Avenue to what is now the Civic Center to the auditorium, in a peaceful demonstration.
- J: You don't hear a whole lot about marches in Mobile.
- H: No.
- J: Why is that?
- H: I don't know. I think it was because of the separation of the people with commonalities, because the urban—which is, I know we're talking about the urban renewal project. It separated people. So, it was hard, I guess, to unite on things that we needed to in that era.
- J: That's interesting, Sissy.

- H: I mean, the whole—like I said, the St. Matthew's thing. I just know that I probably would've—probably been a little bit different as far as—I don't know, man. I didn't want to go to McGill, either.
- J: Really? Did you end up going?
- H: Yeah. It was fun, too. [Laughter] But I had a friend that wasn't going to McGill, and she was going to public schools. In fact, she—I'm not sure that she went to St. Matthew's. But I don't know. Just, I guess, exposed to different things. Because, you know, it was a lot different back in the [19]60s and [19]70s.
- J: I interviewed a fellow, and he was telling me that even though you might've gone to one church Down the Bay, but if a church had a picnic, everybody would go to the picnic.
- H: Oh, everybody would go to the picnics, everybody go to the festivals. Because—and my mother, you know, we were talking about the fudge. Okay, if St. Peter Claver was having a raffle, then people from St. Joseph's, and Heart of Mary, and all of the other churches would sell their tickets, too. It was just, like, a big community of people. And I think it had a lot to do with, you know, the Black community wanting to support each other. Because we had to. You know?
- J: Mmhm.
- H: Because it was such a niche of a community, West Mobile wasn't there. And then as that started developing, then things started changing [crosstalk 30:17].
- J: How about the Methodist churches and the Baptist churches? Did y'all participate in any of their fundraisers and festivals?
- H: Now, I—not particularly, but growing up where I did, there was a Baptist church that was built right adjacent to our house. I mean, we watched it—when they laid the foundation, we used to roller skate on it. St. Peter Baptist Church. And so the kids next door, they ended up attending that church. That's where they went to church. And so in the summertime, I used to go to vacation Bible school with them, mainly because I wouldn't have anything else to do because they were all there. [Laughter] Didn't have anybody to play with! So, that's as far as my participation, as far as with that church. But not really, I don't remember.
- J: Right adjacent to St. Peter's. That's interesting. That's a big church now.

H: Yeah, that block has evolved into St. Peter. I mean, I wish they had—I mean, I'm not saying that I regret what is happening now, but they wanted to buy the house, our parents, the house I grew up in.

J: Oh, at one time?

H: And I don't know whatever the reasons were; we didn't want to sell it, or the price wasn't right, or something or another. But I thought eventually they'd own that whole block. Because it has grown.

J: You need to go out, or you good, Joseph?

JJ: I'm just standing.

J: Okay. That is interesting. Thank you for telling me about St. Matthew's, because I hadn't had a whole bunch of folks talk about it. What's the difference between living on New Jersey Street where you were reared, and living on Gayle Street where you have your own home?

H: There are white neighbors.

J: Oh, you have white neighbors now?

H: That have been here all along. I mean, when I was living on New Jersey as a kid, these people were living in these houses. And that makes me feel good, just because they knew my grandmother and aunt who lived here.

J: Oh, tell me who your grandmother was and who your aunt was.

H: Okay, Lucille Holmes and Amy Holmes. And they lived on Dearborn Street. Now see, how many times had Dearborn come up?

J: Several.

H: And New Jersey Street, that's where, you know, I grew up, and now my—Sheila is on New Jersey Street and Dearborn. So, it's like that's the way it should stay. But yeah, so it was the grocery store, there were bottling companies; so it was kind of a busy little area. But you had neighbors all around that knew your mother; that was the main thing. We had that, like I said, village. And everybody, you know, we

just—everybody knew everybody. And now, here—well of course, I'm an adult, but I've got different neighbors. It's a different feel. It's a strangeness to it, you know, in a way. But most of the homes here now in this area are probably rental properties, and there's not family in them, you know? Like, these are families that—the daughter and the son live there, the daughter-in-law and the son live there. The mom's still there, but the sons are still there, too. That's what I don't like about this area, is people leave. Some of the houses are just run down because—like, if I would've left new Jersey Street vacant to this point, it would just be one of those houses I'm talking about. So we, you know, we got family in there. That means something.

J: This business about—yeah, I think people down there on Palmetto Street, we have a lot of Section 8.

H: Yeah, that too.

J: And it's tough for the owners—a lot of the owners aren't there, aren't in the city.

H: Right.

J: A lot of people who are doing the Section 8 when they live in Atlanta, or they live somewhere else. And that presents a problem when problems come up.

H: Yeah, it does. Because initially, you got to bring this house up to code for them to be approved for Section 8. And then once that happens, you get the tenants in there, and man, now, some of them don't care.

J: Right.

H: And it breaks my heart. But I'm here. This is my house, and I'm not going anywhere I don't think, because I don't owe anybody anything for this. [Laughter]

J: I know that's right.

H: It feels good, too, man! It's good.

J: But what you have here with your white neighbors, did you—was that like that, say—. Some people had called Down the Bay “checkerboard,” because Black folks lived next door to white folks in certain places, in certain parts of Down the Bay.

H: Yeah, I'm trying to think of where—if we had any white neighbors. They might've been scattered about. But you know, this right here, I guess, is a little off of Down the Bay? I still call it, myself, living Down the Bay.

J: That's interesting, because one of the questions for this project is, what are the boundaries for Down the Bay? And it's different for different people, different generation of people. Like, everybody knows to the east is the river and the bay.

H: Right.

J: There's some disagreement about how far west Down the Bay goes.

H: Well, look. This is how I try to think about it: Down the Bay means the bay is the coast, is the bay. At the end of the land is the bay, and then the river is what, beyond where? That's what, I guess, we need to determine. Because the bay—Causeway, on one side is the bay; on the other side, you've got all these rivers. So, I'm thinking that's where it stops.

J: Okay.

H: But then, like, I'm thinking on this side of Broad Street. That's why I'm not really Down the Bay. This is Oakdale.

J: Some of the seniors that I've interviewed, they claim all the way to Michigan Avenue.

H: Really?

J: Mmhm.

H: Because now—I know this is a bit off the subject.

J: That's okay.

H: Midtown. And so, people say, "Do you live in Midtown?" And I say, "Well—." Or "Do you live in Oakleigh?" I say, "Well, I'm on the cusp." Because it's like, this is Gayle Street—I'm going to turn the air down real quick.

J: Sure. Go ahead.

H: Because it feels a little warm, and I don't keep it real low in the day. So, the Oakleigh—

J: Still recording? Cool.

H: I live on Gayle Street. Now, this happens in cities. I lived in Pensacola, and I used to be so lost. Because if you drive down one street, a few miles down, it changes names. Like, I don't know. It was so hard to find my way around.

J: Yeah, yeah.

H: So, this is Gayle Street. Once you cross Texas, it's Chatham. And that's the Oakleigh. Oakleigh starts at Texas. So, I know a lot of people that live in Oakleigh, and I go to Callahan's. And every time you're at a social event or something, they say, "Well, where do you live?" It's like, "Do you live in Oakleigh?" I say, "Well, I'm on the cusp." [Laughter] That's what I say. Because I'm on Chatham, but once you cross Texas, it becomes Gayle. And it's across Virginia, which puts me in another district, too, from New Jersey Street. So I mean, I was like, I didn't grow up in this area. I don't want to vote for people—I don't even know what's happening on DIP and all. I want to affect things that happen Down the Bay.

J: Oh, this is part of the voting area with DIP.

H: Mmhm.

J: Okay.

H: And that really bothered me. It took me a long time before I changed my address to Gayle Street.

J: Well, there a lot of folks who thought they were going to school in one place, and ended up at B.C. Rain. And they don't know how.

H: I don't either.

J: You know, but the way they sort of redivided the school districts.

H: Mmhm, it's crazy. But anyway.

J: Where did y'all play? Well, I know you going to say the Boulevard.

H: Well, that's where the football games took place. But you know, we had—Crawford Park, that was the park, and Texas Street—the rec center wasn't there, but I think there was some kind of park or something there. But we were—we played in the streets, honey. I mean, we roller skated and everything all in the—.

J: Y'all kill me when y'all start talking about roller skating.

H: You can't—.

J: Y'all were some roller-skating folk!

H: And look, Texas—you know, the surface of the streets, it's not the asphalt. It was before the asphalt. It's like, real smooth? I mean, it was like skating on ice. Because the streets were just, no rocks, no bumps. But we had Mardi Gras parades, too. Right down on New Jersey Street.

J: Tell me about those.

H: There was a guy that—there was nine kids that lived in the house next door to me.

J: What was the family name?

H: Thomas.

J: Okay.

H: Well, Ronnie's name was **Sutland**. I think his—I don't know what that story line is, but there was nine of them. And the oldest and youngest were girls, and the rest were boys. Thus, the tomboy: me. And she was, too, the youngest girl. And Ronnie, who was like the third from the oldest or something, he was real artistic. He just loved to draw. And so, we had Naman's Grocery Store, we had the bottling company, so there was a lot of access to cardboard boxes and stuff. And their father was like *Sanford and Son's* Sanford. [Laughter] He had junk. So, we could create and make all kinds of things. So, he would get the boxes and cut up, and draw, and make Mardi Gras floats. And then we'd go around to the little TGNY and buy candy and stuff, and we would tell everybody in the neighborhood we were having a parade. And so, Lauren, the youngest girl, we were like the majorettes, and the boys would get the boxes from the grocery store and put their belt loops—loop them around into their belts. Then they'd jump, and we'd have parades around

the neighborhood. [Laughter] I mean, that's when you—that's what "kids" means, okay? Invent things and stuff. But, yeah, we used to have a good little time in the neighborhood. You don't see things like that anymore.

J: No.

H: You don't even see kids riding bicycles on Christmas Day anymore.

J: And definitely not skating!

H: And definitely not skating. [Laughter] Yeah. But you know, part of that, too, has got to do with, "Well, I don't want you to go skating on this street because, you know, something might happen to you." Well, as opposed to that thought, our thought was, "Well, you better not do that, because Ms. So-and-so is going to tell your mother!" So, anywhere we went, there was an eye looking out for us, you know? And that was a good thing, I think, back then. But.

J: Tell me about skating and Christmas.

H: Man, Christmas? Everybody would be either riding their bike or skating, and they went well together. Because if you got a bike, then you could pull the person on the skates on the bike, you know? The skating thing, it was just training day every Christmas. Every new pair of skates, you got to learn new tricks and stuff. You got to go farther, too, see?

J: What do you mean?

H: Well, if you wanted to go somewhere and you got on your skates, it wasn't like walking. It just made the trip like more fun and easier. So, we would go everywhere. But it was right on Texas Street. They used to call it Texas Hill, where the smooth street was? And that's where everybody used to go and skate. I think my foot got run over by a car one time, and I didn't tell anybody because I was holding onto the back of the car. My foot must've slipped under there.

J: Unh-uh!

H: No harm, though. [Laughter] But yeah, I mean, it was just a community of kids, now. I mean, back Down the Bay?

J: It was a lot of them out there on Christmas.

- H: Mmhm. I mean, you know, some people only got one little thing, and maybe those skates were passed down, too, but—
- J: You sort of have alluded to this, about community—participation in community sharing and stuff; and I wonder, in creating your own fun, creating your own leisure, why—and I've had other interviewees tell me about serving. Like, when people come over to your house, you serve them. What was that about? Why such a—you know, "Mr. Billy was a comrade, and they would come over to the house." What was that about? How do you—if you were to describe it to somebody?
- H: You mean serve them like feeding them?
- J: Mmhm, yeah, and—yeah, beverages, food.
- H: You know, I don't know. But I mean, I have thoughts on that, but I'm thinking, "Man, maybe that's why everybody is so fat!" [Laughter] But I think it was a part of nourishing, you know? That's what people do. That's how you take care of each other. And I guess it was just a part of comradery, you know? Break bread together. You family; eat together. You nurture me, and we take care of each other. I guess that was—you know, there weren't things, other places I guess, to do it, either. Like little Comrades meetings at the houses and stuff? Everybody have the meetings at their house. And then, of course, that was when the good food—boy, I used to love those leftovers.
- J: Like what? What kind of good food?
- H: Well, we had the Le Sueur peas and not just the regular peas. Them were club meeting peas; that's what we all thought! [Laughter] And look, I wasn't no vegetable eater, right?
- J: Right.
- H: But I remember those Le Sueur peas. Those are tiny, the tiny peas. They just taste so much better than the big green peas. But like that, you know? You knew Momma was going to put on the feast for the club meeting. So, we'd wait, boy! We'd wait on those leftovers.
- J: Tell me about some of the other jobs that the adults in your neighborhood had as you remember. What kind of other things did they do for a living?

H: You know, I'd have to think on that one. Because as a kid, you didn't really mind the adult business too much, you know?

J: Talk to me, yeah.

H: You just saw people go and come, and I can't tell you if there was anything—like, these days, you don't know. We talking about the show *Breaking Bad*; you don't know what people go out and do. You just knew they came home, and everything looked normal. So, I don't really know what a lot of people did. Because we just didn't pay attention to that. I know what my daddy did, and every day when he came home, I was like, "Hey, Daddy's home."

J: When it was just you and your dad, where did y'all go to launch the boat to go fishing?

H: There was—McNally Park was one place down off the Parkway. We went over—on the Causeway, there were just launches all along the Causeway there. Of course, see, that was before the Bayway was there, so there was a lot of free places to just launch a boat over there.

J: Got you, got you.

H: And then, there was—we used to go down Dauphin Island Parkway to Dauphin Island. Where Jemison's is, there's a little—it was called the Cutoff. Why they called it that? I guess it's where the bay and the bridge—I don't know, but that was some of the best fishing. Right there. Like, you get in the boat, and you go [boat noises].

J: Wait, where is this now?

H: Right before you cross Dauphin Island Bridge.

J: Okay.

H: You know where Jemison's is?

J: Yeah.

H: Right there where all those boats put out. Right there—not under the bridge, but just like to the right of that little bridge. And I think it's, like, water channels through there. Because I've caught redfish right on the side of the road. Right there in that little canal, they run through there.

J: Really?

H: Yeah. But I mean, I didn't even have to go far. But that was one of the best fishing spots that my daddy went; he loved that spot. But, yeah, there were several places we went, and I don't know whether it was, like, something to do with what the weather was like that day or whatever to determine where we went. I used to love to go fishing with him because we got to eat snacks and stuff. He used to love those little—you know those banana cream cakes, the little foamy, like, sponge cake things? But he never ate that stuff at home! [Laughter] He never ate sweets too much at home. But yeah, we never went up, like, Saraland, up freshwater fishing. He didn't do too much freshwater fishing. Not with me, anyway.

J: Hurricanes. Hurricanes. Do most people in the neighborhood evacuate or stay for the storms?

H: Oh, we stayed. We stayed. Thankfully, we haven't had a major one since Hurricane Frederic, because after Frederic, everybody said they wouldn't stay anymore. [Laughter] But we always stayed. And there were a couple that were bad flood-wise. I remember Dad going and picking up people in his boat, that their houses had flooded. Because you know, that might've been—when was Frederic, in [19]70—? Yeah, so the urban renewal project was pretty much done. So, now people were living in houses that were on foundations and not off the ground. So, okay, some of the houses started to flood when it was—I don't remember that hurricane. It wasn't Hurricane Frederic. It was before Frederic.

J: Mhm. Was it Camille?

H: Yeah. But then, that would be before the urban renewal, though.

J: Yeah, it would be.

H: But I remember him picking up people in the boats. Well, maybe like for Frederic, might've been going across the street and picking up somebody. I remember him picking up people in the boat when hurricanes would come through. But yeah, nobody left.

J: Why didn't they decide to leave? Why did they—?

H: You know, I think—.

JJ: Battery.

J: Oh, okay. There's a battery in the pouch of the—.

JJ: Do I need to stop it?

J: Yeah, let's stop for a second.

H: Okay.

[Side comments to dog 51:07]

J: A lot of folks, when they talk about urban renewal, they talk about displacement; how folks ended up whole parts of Toulminville, migrated out there. Make you change your church affiliation, so you might be going to Bethel here, but you end up at Warren, Toulminville-Warren and all those places. But still, people who belong to Delaware Street still come to Down the Bay to go to church—

H: Right. Right. But sometimes, it became a bit of a challenge, too. And for me—and we didn't talk about it—but, like I say, all my friends; I didn't have anybody left to hang out with, because they all moved but us. But then—and then the way they came and did the house, I just thought it was kind of shabby. So, maybe we'll get into that and the civil rights, because I think if they were white people, they'd probably do it right. You know what I mean? I felt like they weren't honest there.

J: Okay, so, yeah—I mean, I think that the housing board, the political structure of the time; there's some things going on there that are not necessarily written in the history book, right?

H: Absolutely.

J: And can be told because it's those fine distinctions about—go ahead. You were talking about shabbiness, and why that existed on some of the homes and some of those things.

H: Okay, so we'll go to this: here comes urban renewal. Now, whatever the reasons were that people decided to leave or stay, I imagine some did not have a choice. But we already talked about my dad doing some remodeling to our house, so that should state right there that it was pretty well kept for as much as he could do to—. So, the decision was made. They didn't want to move. They wanted to stay and have their house refurbished, or remodeled, or whatever they wanted to call it. Because it wasn't, in my opinion, well done. So, I guess I was in high school at the time or somewhere around, because this house came as a result of all that, too. Was how we found this house. But I watched these guys that came in. The boss, as I guess you can put it; they just didn't seem as knowledgeable as I thought they should be. And I'm saying this now, here, after the fact, some what? 50, 60 years later. Well, not 60, I'm not that old. Strike that. 50 years later. [Laughter] I'm not sure that they knew what they were doing. And if you look at what they did, it's like, "Well, they really should've done this this way." I think that they probably were—it was because of who they were dealing with. This was some white contractors. And I don't want to get into that racism too much, but we know how things were back in that—

J: No, when I first moved to Mobile, before these guys were born, we had a house on Marine and Savannah.

H: So, when did you move here?

J: This would be about 2003, 2004. It was part of—they have an Oakleigh revolving fund to help new homeowners, you know? And they took that house there on the corner of Savannah, 912 Savannah, down to the studs. To the studs of the house. And the contractor didn't really hire the best—you know Oakleigh, some of them houses have real—I mean, it's a very specific type of work with those historic houses. Some of the carpenters in dealing with that house, they just weren't—you know, they didn't put the care into the craft that they were doing.

H: Right.

J: It came out okay, but I just felt like, "These guys aren't really taking the type of pride that if I had those skills, I would."

H: Right. And yeah, I know—in fact, when my phone rang when you got here, it was my friend Eddie that did that back porch for me. And if you look at that craftsmanship and the skill and labor that he put into that by himself to close that porch in, it's like—that was one person. So, I know what it looks like, what it's

supposed to look like. And now I'm thinking about, you know, back with our house, the way they—they should've done more. They should've been more thorough; it was kind of a shell of what it should've been, in my opinion. So, I'm wondering if other people that chose to remodel would have that same opinion. Because—

J: Yeah, I mean, it's tough to talk about race in Down the Bay—in Mobile in general, but in Down the Bay specifically because of how funky things can get.

H: Yeah. And you know, just the whole—I've never heard "Down the Bay," like, on the news—you wouldn't hear Down the Bay and it be a good thing. I don't think that phrase wasn't used, but people knew it. And so, it kind of had a stigma to it. But now it's like, "Down the Bay? Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah." Because it's more of—okay, you know it's a history there.

J: Ah! So in its memory, it's much more favorable.

H: Yeah, it is.

J: Okay.

H: I mean, because successful people grew up Down the Bay: Gary Cooper is one example. I mean, you know, it's like, it wasn't a bad place. Bad things happen everywhere. You know. But you're talking about during the era that I was growing up. Things on the news, you saw people on TV, and you were hoping that it was not one of you, you know what I mean? So, the news was—but it was a whole lot different, man.

J: Where did you first vote? Where was your first vote cast?

H: First vote was at St. Joan of Arc school on Ann Street.

J: That was the polling station?

H: That was the polling station. My mother used to work there on election days.

J: Did she?

H: Yeah. Yeah, that's where I voted up until I moved here.

J: Mmhm, mmhm.

- H: And actually, when I moved here, like I said, I didn't change my address right away because I was assuming that I was in the same polling—you know, had the same polling place. But now I vote at Rock of Faith, which is on this end of Ann Street. And like I say, this is the end of the district. Virginia Street is the—
- J: Cutoff.
- H: —dividing line. So, I really, like I said, I'm on the cusp. For real, I am. I would much rather be—because that's the area that I still consider my home and my, you know, that's dear to my heart.
- J: But you on the cusp of a lot of things. Because you come in there right on the cusp of civil rights, too, coming up. And sort of—
- H: Yeah, because the whole integration thing, there was a lot of resistance to that and the bussing. Like you said, "Why do I have to go to B.C. Rain this far out here when there's Murphy, there's Williamson?" And a lot of people went to Davidson, which was even further. That whole—I understand the integration thing, because I sat here and I said going to St. Matthew's changed me. Because I got to go meet and become friends with white people that I hadn't had that chance to, because this area was primarily Black, and the school I went to, and everything, I mean. So. But civil rights was tough for me, again, with my complexion. It was just like: okay, you wanted so much to fight for the equal rights, and be a part of it; but at the same time, you didn't look like it.
- J: Well, that has come up with Down the Bay a lot. Like, there's this term that some folks use, which is Creole. And I don't know—I'm trying to figure out what the implications of that term are for the neighborhood of Down the Bay in your time.
- H: You know, I didn't hear it a lot. Creole, I don't think I heard it a lot. But again, being young, and being a kid, and being teased, it wasn't like, "Oh, you a Creole." To me, it was just high yellow, you know? But as I got older, and as civil rights kind of evolved, people—the realization of where it came from, you know. You're French and you're African American; you've got a lot of mixed things. But that complexion comes from the French. You know, it really doesn't have anything more so with race. Everybody's mixed. And any educated person knows why some people darker and some people weren't, and as people traveled, they started intermingling. And that's how we got all these different complexions.

J: Your daddy being from New Orleans, did he have a particular—did you hear him talk about that, or—?

H: Not really, but he wasn't somebody who thought like that too much, you know? He was all business. But my grandmother and my cousins that lived there probably—because they may have had more of a feel for it. But we didn't really talk about that too much. I mean, I think it was more so we just tried to identify as being Black, because of what was going on. You know, the whole civil rights. Power in numbers. We've got to unite. We got to show who we are. And let's not differentiate you Creole, and—I don't know.

J: What did you do after high school?

H: Well, I had this concept, I wanted to be like a Wall Street person. [Laughter] So, I went to a business college.

J: Okay, where did you go to business college at?

H: It was so stupid. [Laughter] It was this business college on Government Street called 20th Century Business College? I went, and you know, nothing really became of it because I wasn't ambitious enough. I could've probably used that and done something with it. But I learned that there was a basketball team out at the University of South Alabama. A women's basketball team; who'd've thunk? Because when I went to McGill-Toolen, *The Dirty Dozen* was the thing. That was all about—the female sports was basically the *Dirty Dozen* volleyball team.

J: Okay, I got you.

H: And I played volleyball at St. Matthew's, and I played basketball at St. Matthew's. And I was pretty good at both. But I wasn't a big fan of volleyball, mainly because I kept bending my thumb back. I hated that. [Laughter] But McGill didn't have a basketball team, and I didn't want to play volleyball. So, the year after the 20th Century College, then I heard about the basketball team. A friend took me to see a game, and I said, "Shoot. I can do that." So, I enrolled at South. I walked on and made the basketball team. And then I got injured like two weeks before the first game; had surgery on my knee, went to rehab, all of that. Came back the second year and I injured my other knee. Needless to say, there was no scholarship or anything involved, but I did stay in school and get my degree in business management. [Laughter]

J: What year did you come out of South?

H: [19]83.

J: No kidding?

H: Yeah! That was part of the reason—one of the reasons I'm doing this is because it's South Alabama. So, I wanted to tell you; said, "Yeah, I'm probably out there in the archives, too!" And you know what? You can even help a sister out. I did get my picture put in the program one time for the basketball team, even though I didn't play. And I said, "Man,—" You know, no internet or nothing back then.

J: Right, we need to get a copy of that.

H: And I wonder if there is any way that there is a copy or something, like on fiche or something somewhere, because I never had a copy of it apparently. But I know I was in that first year. When I got hurt the two weeks before the first game, I know I was in that program. It would've been 1979, [19]80, something like that.

J: What was your experience like at South?

H: It was great. It was great because of the exposure to, again, a whole realm of people that I had never been around. People from different states, people from different countries. And, you know, being an athlete, it was just the comradery with that. So, I latched on; I loved it. I could've stayed in school forever. My momma used to say, "What you majoring in? Partying?" [Laughter] We used to have a good time. But I mean—

J: Wait, did you stay out there near campus?

H: I did the first—okay, so we talked about Hurricane Frederic. I was at home. That was my freshman year at South, and then Frederic came. I was supposed to be moving into the dorms that fall. Frederic was September. I remember borrowing my brother's car, and it took me, I don't know, about an hour and a half to get out to South to try to see if the dorms were still there. Because I was due to move in them in like a week or so. And I did. I mean, my parents still didn't have power when I left to go move into the dorms for what would be my sophomore year. I stayed a year in Alpha dorms. Isn't that like the medical something?

J: On the backside of the—

H: Yeah, the backside, like—.

J: Mmhm.

H: And then, the next year I moved into an apartment with some friends that I had met and played intramural sports with; I moved out to an apartment.

J: Was there a Black Student Union then?

H: It may have been—small.

J: Okay.

H: Because, I mean, it was a pretty good mix of students race-wise, but—.

J: But very small?

H: I hung out with the athletes, and that was my thing. So, I don't—I mean—.

J: But you had a pretty good experience with the athletic program, even though you blew out your knees?

H: Yeah, I did. I ended up—actually, one of my—I was on work study.

J: Mmhm. Well, where'd you work at?

H: Well, the first year—oh, God! It was so boring, Kern! I worked in the administration office in the Dean of Finance office. His name was **Olen Glenn**, and then this little lady, little bitty lady. I forget her name, I'll probably think of it. But I remember he would answer the phone. He would say, "**Olen Glenn**, University of South Alabamer." And I hated it so much! [Laughter] But I ended up working in the athletic department.

J: Oh, you did?

H: Yes, sir. I worked with—Eddie Stankey was there?

J: Mmhm, baseball coach.

H: Baseball coach. Ellis, Cliff Ellis, the basketball coach was there.

J: Oh, wow. Yeah.

H: And then, they started getting other programs, soccer teams and stuff. But yeah, I loved working at that athletic department. They were so much fun!

J: That is good to know, because a lot of folks didn't have as good an experience at South when I talk to them. They went to South because it was economical—

H: Right.

J: —and it was close.

H: Yep.

J: But they didn't send their kids there. They sent their kids elsewhere. And they— we're trying to—I don't know if you been out there and seen the new alumni building.

H: It's beautiful out there.

J: Oh, my God!

H: I mean, if everything that's there now—mainly the football team—would've been there when I was there? I probably would still be going, just so I could get all the amenities. And I haven't joined the alumni association. I need to, but—because it's like, "I could use the rec center." But golly, man, I can't haul out there! I didn't want to renew my football tickets, my season tickets, because I didn't want to—I mean, Ladd was so convenient! We tailgated at the house. But I went to a few games? I'm hooked.

J: Really?

H: It's beautiful. It's nice, so nice.

J: That's good to know.

H: It's beautiful. The campus is beautiful. They've got it where, you know, it's easy to maneuver and all. That was another thing: the traffic and all that. But the shuttles; they got it so organized. It's really nice. I'm proud.

J: I'm glad.

H: Very proud.

J: I haven't been to a football game on campus yet.

H: It's really nice.

J: I need to go.

H: Because I mean, it's quaint, but it's a nice stadium. And it looks great. Everything is professional. I mean, it's just like, "Golly, this is my school?" We used to play basketball in the gym. I mean, they didn't even have an arena. And I worked in the intramural department, too. I worked with Phil Theodore. He just retired, I think.

J: Yeah. You worked with Phil?

H: And Singletary, John Singletary. I didn't see him when he got his—he got acknowledged for something, so many years or something that he got.

J: I didn't know John, but I knew Phil fairly well. Fairly well.

H: Yeah.

J: You won't believe this, but I been there almost 20 years.

H: Really?

J: I came in 2003. Yep. You know, you're right: the amenities, the feeling of a traditional campus. Because y'all were on the quarter system.

H: Yeah, and it was 14 dollars a quarter hour.

J: That's crazy!

H: Isn't it? What is it now a semester?

J: I can't even, you know?

H: I mean, I can't imagine.

J: I think to take a class might be anywhere from 25[00] to 3400 dollars.

H: Yeah, yeah.

J: That's amazing. Well, I'm glad. I'm glad.

H: It was a positive for me, and, you know, a lot of it had to do with the friendships I developed.

J: Sure, sure.

H: Most of my friends that I have from my past, other than the neighborhood, are from college. Not close to a lot of high school people, but it's college. So, it was my foundation.

J: Two more things I want to talk to you about. One is Mardi Gras. Okay, like what did y'all do during Mardi Gras, and where did y'all stand for parades and stuff?

H: Now, growing up, the Mardi Gras parades—I think most of the organizations were down—the float launch was down near Brookley area or something, down this area. Because the parades would come down Broad Street. So, growing up—and my dad played in a band, and they played on the back of a truck during the parades. So, as a kid, Momma would pile us in the station wagon, and we'd go. I'm not sure where we went downtown, or like see the parades on Government; but we would come back home, park the car, and then walk down the corner of New Jersey and Broad and see the parade go back by there. [Laughter] And it was cool! I mean, it was really cool. But you know—and then, as I got older, I started venturing off into other areas as a teen. But that's what we did then, you now? Now, everybody has their little spots, right?

J: Right.

H: The Down the Bay people have a spot, down on the corner of Warren and Government. And that's where everybody from Down the Bay—. Because I'm too

old for that. I don't go downtown too much for it. I just go right around the corner here to Broad. [Laughter]

J: That's interesting: your father played on the back of the truck. Now, he played with a lot of different groups.

H: Yeah.

J: What was his instrument?

H: He played bass fiddle, but he played tuba. I think he learned tuba when he was in the military, because he was asked if he wanted to be in the band, and he was asked if he knew how to play it. And he lied and said yes, and then taught himself how to play the tuba. [Laughter] So, he played the tuba. He played in the Excelsior Band, too.

J: Did he?

H: My dad did, yeah.

J: I didn't know that!

H: Yep. I can't tell you exactly when. Butch probably can.

J: But he was also—don't do that, Joseph. He was also in the Coleman Orchestra?

H: Yeah, he played with E.B. Coleman Band. In fact, the night that I was born, they were playing, and my mother went into labor with me. They called my dad, told him that she was in labor, and then another member of the band—Mr. Coleman's, actually, wife—went into labor. Momma used to tell the story as, "I passed her coming out of the delivery room as she was going in." [Laughter] At Martin de Porres Hospital. Now, down on the street, Virginia Street, Allen Memorial Home? It's a nursing home?

J: Nursing home, mmhm.

H: It was a hospital. It was the Black hospital. It was Catholic run by Black nuns.

J: Black nuns?

H: Mmhm.

J: Wow.

H: Back in—well, that's where I was born. I hope it ain't where I die. Please, please! [Laughter] No, I'm too close to home! Born there, grew up there. [Laughter] I don't like the way this is shaping out. But, yeah, it was a hospital.

J: Okay, okay.

H: That's where most of the Down the Bay babies was born—a lot of the Catholic ones.

J: Okay, okay.

H: And then, I think that there was a county hospital over on the other side of Spring Hill.

J: Mobile General?

H: Yeah, that's where Butch was born, I think. No, not Butch, my other brother. Butch was born at—.

J: Oh, you didn't name your other brothers. There was Butch—.

H: Frank, and Harry.

J: You did name them. I'm sorry.

H: Mmhm, and Frank was the quarterback that played at Williamson. All of them played football, but Frank went on to Grambling.

J: Yeah, I miss Frank.

H: I miss my—I've got—I miss my relatives that have died. So many people have died of cancers, about just make me mad. But yeah, I miss my brothers, man.

J: There does seem to be—this is a whole other topic, but there does seem to be a high rate of cancer.

H: It's incredible!

J: It's a hotspot. It's a Center for Disease Control hotspot, and they no longer can say it was people working at ADDSCO.

H: No!

J: Because it's something else going on beyond that.

H: It is, because people are getting lung cancer that have never smoked. And you know, different things, it's like—I just don't understand it. I mean, that's one of my biggest fears, is like, okay, going to the doctor—because from one year to the next, you don't know.

J: You don't know.

H: But yeah.

J: Well, I sure have enjoyed chatting with you about Down the Bay.

H: Man, I didn't realize that you weren't a Down the Bay-er until your adult life.

J: Yeah, yeah.

H: Because, I mean, it was just, it was so different. I mean, **Daryn**, D.K. When I talked about kids, his face was in my head. I can see him because I used to pick on him so much. Every summer, our parents, they would feud because of us.

J: Why?

H: Because, I mean, in the summertime, you got too much time for kids. So we would all fight and pick on each other, jank and tease, and that would result in them getting mad at each other.

J: Lord have mercy!

H: Because we were just so bad. But we were really inventive. We never had a dull moment. When we were kids, we didn't have all this automation and stuff to help us, you know?

J: Did y'all ever go down on the island?

H: Oh yeah, man. There was a place [inaudible 25:07]. Have you heard about the house, with the cliff and all that?

J: Mmhm.

H: [Laughter] You go down however you got down, and you would walk so far your parents couldn't even see you.

J: Out in the bay?

H: Mmhm, but the water be like this deep [waist deep].

J: It's fairly shallow.

H: It was really shallow. I mean, it's just a sandy surface. And I guess from when they dredged out the canal for the big boats, all of that came up and just made the water just real shallow. I'm assuming that's part of it. Now, the house was up here, and then there was like a cliff because the—what do you call it? When water erodes. But ooh, boy! We used to have so much fun. Because that was the thing on Sundays. "We going to the island!" Or we would go down sometimes, spend the night down there. And it was just an open house, screen doors. And it had a kitchen, bathrooms. It was like a clubhouse. And it was a clubhouse. But it was just past the Fowl River bridge. But it was—that was the Sunday hangout.

J: All right.

H: Everybody bring food, and there you go.

J: Yeah, yep. I just had to ask about that before we shut it down. But Sissy, thank you so much for—

H: Yeah, man. I mean, I told Butch, I said, "I'm just going to try to answer the questions, because there's things I don't recall," but as you start talking—

J: You start remembering.

H: —you start remembering. So. Because specifics and dates—being a kid—and I was just such a rambunctious child. I mean, I really, I got in trouble and stuff. So I wasn't attuned to the serious things. Like, "I don't know what your daddy does. I

just know that he comes home. And this one, he comes home drunk, and this one”—you know what I mean? [Laughter] You knew who was questionable. Maybe they don't work.

J: Right.

H: The junk man; we knew what he did.

J: Sure.

H: But man, it was all kinds, though. It was just nice. It was nice. So.

J: Well, that's as good a note to end on as any.

H: The urban renewal thing really just disrupted it, though. Because it just divide. Like you said, people got—

J: Displaced.

H: —displaced, and lost contact, and—.

J: What happened to your grandma's house?

H: You know where Sheila lives?

J: Yeah.

H: It was right on that block. So, it was just demolished. And I think my parents didn't want to leave because they didn't want to go away from them. They didn't—I mean, I don't know when they started building the houses down there, whatever. So, before that house was demolished and before they moved, my mother found this house. She was just driving down, you know? You could tell when somebody wasn't living in a place. She came, peeped through the windows, and the house was full of furniture. I don't know how she went about finding the owners. But it was just a case where the lady died, and they just left the house sitting here. So, when my grandmother and aunt moved in, it was completely full of furniture and everything. And so they, you know, disposed of whatever, got rid of that. Then they moved in here in, like, [19]78, [19]79? I walked in. I went, “Man, I like this little house. I want to live here.”

J: Really?

H: I did. Honest to God, I did. And in [19]91, I got in the National Guard. I was in Desert Storm when my aunt died. They called to tell me, and then I couldn't come home for the funeral. But my next thought and the next time, which was a couple of days or so, I talked to my mother. She said, "I was thinking—." I said, "Yeah, I was thinking I want to buy that house!" So, I bought the house from my family.

J: No way.

H: And moved in here.

H: Yep, that piano that's sitting up there was—my aunt used to play that piano. Yeah, it's kind of nice.

J: Yeah.

H: Actually, it's too full circle, man.

J: [Laughter] It's too full circle.

H: The hospital is now a doggone nursing home? [Laughter] That don't—I don't like that! But yeah. So, I feel really good here. I love just the feeling I have living here so close to everything that I just talked about, and just memories, you know? I feel real grounded. I mean, it's nice for me. I don't need anything more. I said, "Man, I want to add—I want a little more—." They said, "Don't add on. Keep it small just like this, because all you do is get more junk." And I got too much junk now. But I love living here.

J: Your nephew—.

[Break in recording]

J: Went out to visit Mobile.

H: Mhm.

J: They're now the same age, and—

H: How old are you?

J: I'm 57.

H: Okay, because I'm trying to figure out how—so, I'm 60, I'll be 64. So, okay, I'm like seven years older than **Daryn**.

J: Joseph, don't do anything with that yet, please.

H: Eight years older than **Hochie**.

J: Yeah.

H: But I thought **Daryn** was a little bit older than him.

J: I think he's one year older.

H: Yeah, one year. Because I used to beat up **Hochie**, too. Ooh, I was so mean to that boy! I mean, it was just the age difference, you know?

J: He's funny. So, all of them in club with me, see?

H: Mmhm.

[End of recording]

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