

Clayton Taylor

Q1: Okay, let's get started with your name.

CLAYTON TAYLOR: Well, I'm Clayton Emory Taylor Junior. And I was born April 6th, 1940 at the old community hospital in Evanston.

Q1: And your parents' names?

CT: My father is Clayton Senior, my mother is Lethia Houston Taylor, Lethia Florence Houston Taylor. My father was to my knowledge born in Chicago, raised in Glencoe. I don't know exactly where he was born, and my mother was born in Evanston, must have been near or either in that hardware store situation you told me about. She used to tell me she was born on -- at home on East Railroad. And he was born in 1918 she was born in 1919 in Evanston.

He went to school here in Glencoe all of his life, most of his life, and she spent all of her school life and young life in Evanston. In fact, to my knowledge my mother never moved out of Evanston except for about a four-year stint when she lived in Glencoe here in the 1970s. Other than that, she was born in Evanston, lived in Evanston except for those four years, returned to Evanston and retired in

Evanston. She died here with us at home in Glencoe. That was 1991.

My father died in Evanston in 1964. He was young, he was just 44 years old. And he was a glazier, one of the first black glaziers in the area, and he worked for a gentleman by the name of Kellman. I can't remember whether it was Joe Kellman or George Kellman. The Kellman family is still prominent in Evanston and Chicago. They were the founders as I understand of Globe Glass. My dad used to work in one of Kellman's small shops in Chicago Avenue near Greenleaf when Kellman was just getting started in the glass business.

And my mother worked -- did day work and maid work about, well most of her young life, and catering work which was about the most a black woman could do then. And then in 1954, '55, she got tired of doing day work and very proudly took on her first regular 40 hour a week job, which was washing test tubes at the Evanston Hospital. And she worked there for over 30 years and of course rose up the ladder in the laboratory and became a lab technician, which brought her into a rather nice salary and a nice retirement. So she went from a poor girl, maid and

catering type person, to someone who could pretty much call her own shots.

Q1: From any of your family's stories, did they tell you why they chose to come to -- let's say whatever descendants, why they decided to come to Evanston Glencoe area?

CT: Well, I don't know why they came to Evanston because it's kind of unique, but as a youngster -- and this is probably true of most kids today, most kids in any generation -- we never thought much [00:05:00] about what had gone on before. We were so occupied -- our parents were so occupied with trying to survive in the present. And we were so occupied with just trying to be happy in a (chuckles) sad situation that I know we would question it as youngsters but I don't think we realized what the old people were telling us, you know.

Someone -- I remember some people talking about coming -- or people old enough to recall coming out of slavery. I remember coming -- the term "come up to freedom". Or like older black folks used to like to say in those days President Lincoln freed them. That's how they phrased it, you know.

I do remember that -- I don't know why my mother's people came this way except I do know they followed the work. They were for the most part servants. So Evanston had a lot of work. Now I know that my father's people came to Glencoe specifically because of the work. There was a lot of work here on the north shore in those days just like there is now but there was a lot of work for black folks. So they followed the work.

My grandmother on my father's side, she -- here's a strange situation in our family -- she was raised with my mother's uncle's wife for a number of years. My grandmother on my father's side had become orphaned because her father died in a farming accident on their farm down in southern Indiana. And their mother died shortly thereafter which left her in the custody of an aunt that lived at 87th and Marsh in Chicago. Well Aunt Sarah, who married my mother's uncle, we called him Uncle Billy -- he's in one of those pictures you've got, so is Aunt Sarah -- they lived in the same household for a number of years and then as young women, going up to their twenties, early twenties I guess.

And then they sort of separated throughout the Chicagoland area, one went one way and one went another. Aunt Sarah

married Uncle Billy and my grandmother, Grandma Taylor, married Raymond Taylor, my grandfather, and moved here to Glencoe. And Aunt Sarah and Uncle Billy moved to Evanston and they still never knew that they were nearby each other until my mom met my dad and they started going together, and eventually as it worked towards marriage, then these two women, who had known each other as youngsters, found themselves back together again, you know, so I remember people -- I remember them talking about that.

And they -- I know Uncle Billy worked at [Bezark?] Clothing. Have you ever heard of that in your... He was a porter there. And all I remember about -- I used to meet Mr. Bezark, we'd go down and visit him on his job in old downtown Evanston, and he was always glad to see us, and he'd always make sure we saw and talk to Mr. Bezark who owned the establishment, Mr. Bezark being a Jewish man from Highland Park. But Mr. Bezark always treated us very nicely and whatnot, and Uncle Billy worked there I don't know how many years he worked. He worked there for decades. He may have worked there 40 years, I don't know, long time till he got sick with asthma and couldn't work anymore.

And I remember Mr. Bezark came to his funeral in 1950, I want to say '53 -- '52 or '53, and Mr. Bezark came to Uncle Billy's funeral, at the old Rayner Funeral Home on Emerson there, and they had to carry him out of there. They had been long-time friends.

So we were servants or porters or whatnot. My dad sort of broke the mold when he became a glazier. His father worked for a number of [00:10:00] years on the railroad. I remember him talking about the run back and forth (inaudible) The Midnight Special, come up from Mississippi from the delta into the train station at Roosevelt and Michigan, Illinois Central. But that wasn't conducive to family life, so he took whatever other work, which is like being a yard man and a butler rather than staying on the railroad.

Then my mother's mother, she was like a maid and a cook. And then sometimes in her later years she would, she became a chef. And then I do recall this period of time she worked for a wealthy family here in Glencoe. And her husband, we called him Flugey, is my step-grandfather because my mother's father had died early on. Flugey is just a roundabout man, a handyman, things like that you

know. So that was, those are our roots. We come from very -- I guess most black folks come from very what we call common -- had to be. (chuckles) Had to be, they wouldn't let you be much more than that, you know. And that's where we came from.

Q1: While you were growing up in Evanston, and we're focusing on you now, on you, growing up in Evanston from the time you can remember as a social playful atmosphere, do you want to talk about that as [far back?] as you can remember up until maybe high school?

CT: You see that's what dominated my life, that's why I can't remember much of any history that the old folks told me about. I was trying to have a good time, that's...

Q1: But usually when your story is (inaudible) what you did you put in a lot of history, a lot of fill-in-the-blanks, you might have gone someplace, gone to a store --

CT: Yeah.

Q1: -- you know, and have names of the stores that I don't know --

CT: Yeah.

Q1: -- about were there.

CT: Well, my first recollection of life with me having a handle on it, some control over it, was when we lived on Church Street in Evanston, that's at 1810 Church Street. And

that's quite a neighborhood. I remember there's a -- of course, you tend to romanticize stuff. It couldn't have been that romantic, there was a war going on, men dying like flies, the neighborhood's empty of young men, they've all gone off to draft and the war, but I remember it as a happy time just because I was a kid and everybody -- even though we were poor, people made things as easy on children as they could.

So we saw the world through rose-colored glasses there on Church Street. Lots of fun, we loved to play in alleys, or whatever. White kids, black kids, like probably coming out of the Depression probably might have looked at us and said we looked like something like *Our Gang* on TV. Only it was more black than white. But it was a friendly neighborhood, we had a Polish grocer on one side of us, Italian grocery across the street, Monticello's Greek Restaurant down the street, and most if not all of their clientele was black. And there were black grocers and store owners further north on Emerson. I can't remember that name of the grocery store that used to be at Emerson and Dodge until Mr. Griffin took over, he also was black. We had a black milkman, who was Mr. Griffin who later took over the store. The mailmen were black. No bus drivers, I remember the

first bus driver, black bus driver, Sam Adams. You ever meet him?

Q1: No.

CT: You ever heard of him? Okay. One of the standout features of the old neighborhood was Mason Park. And all of the kids in that neighborhood, I would say from Emerson south to Church Street, Davis, Darrow, all of that area, Hovland, Brown, [00:15:00] blacks started moving over toward Lake Street, even though there had been blacks over there for a long period of time but more and more blacks. Mason Park became the focus for us in the summertime and winter because they had an ice rink there in the winter. And we spent year after year after happy year in Mason Park in the summer and winter. It dominated our play life I think. It gave us a lot of organized play, it gave us a lot of -- they would do things like they, for nickels and dimes they'd take us on field trips to the beach, museums, plays. They provided organized play time for us at the park, they had a clubhouse. We'd play everything from dominoes and checkers to basketball and croquet and horseshoes, baseball, everything. We had the Evanston Olympics, which Mason Park always won because it was all black and we were the fastest. We won the horseshoe tournaments, baseball tournaments, Mason and Foster just dominated. And bet if

you looked into life in the summer at Foster and Mason, you would find those were the two most active parks in Evanston. Had to be. They just had to be.

I remember Mason would stay open till late at night -- what we thought was late -- 10 o'clock. Even in the winter when they'd open it up for ice skating? We'd go over there on snowy nights, and there was an older Italian guy I recollect who was a caretaker. He'd light up the stove and fix it so we could, all the kids could skate. It seemed like Emerson took good care of its children then.

My walk from the Church Street neighborhood to Dewey School every day was some kind of adventure. I got this cold. Probably up till the early '50s, all my reco-- even though we had a hard family life at home, all my recollections of Evanston and the neighborhood were all positive. All my recollections of school were very positive. And I may add we got good educations then too, very good.

Q1: Which elementary school did you go to?

CT: Dewey, old Dewey School. The same school my mother went to.

Q1: Can you tell me about that experience at Dewey?

CT: Well, it was just; it was a great place to be. We would feel for the Foster kids, we heard the kids used to fight over there all the time. Well, we had our little fights at Dewey, but Dewey was about 10 or 15 percent black and the rest white. No Asians, no Mexicans in those days. It was just black and white. And it was just a happy place to be.

We knew the world was segregated, like when the teachers would ask us what we wanted to be, even though some of the black kids, their parents were doctors or accountants or whatnot, most of our parents were just making it, you know. So if a teacher asked us what we wanted to be, "Well, I want to be a bus driver." Or "I want to be a baseball player." Or "Maybe I could work at the post office." You know, those were our aspirations. Where the white kids, they'd -- "What do you want to be?" "I'm gonna be a doctor, I'm going to" -- you know -- "be a CEO of this company." We didn't know what CEO meant or whatever they called it then. So we knew we lived in two different worlds, but it didn't matter. Our world was happy and full.

You know I was talking to my wife last night. I don't remember anything about any abuse to any children in the

neighborhood. We all got whipped for doing the wrong things, and it was ritualized. If you did this and you did that, it's just a given. You was gonna get whipped - bottom line. And I was gonna get whipped the same way if I did the wrong things. And that's all there was to it. We'd bear our scars and bruises just put on our short pants and whatnot, and we're gone. Just like, you know, that was life. We didn't look on it as abusive, and the things we got whipped for, we needed whipping.

They didn't have things like daycare and managed care and all that kind of stuff. [00:20:00] You had to stay with Aunt Sally or the girl next door would take care of you while your folks went off to work, or your grandmother would and they had time for all that stuff. You had to do what they said when they said it, and if you didn't do it you got whipped, bottom line. The whole neighborhood of kids got whipped, happiest kids in the world.

So we respected our parents, we just looked at -- this was life, you know. Do the wrong thing, dad's gonna knock you up. So we all knew it, you know, so what was the sense of fussing about it? But it's like we never, it didn't seem - - did it scar us emotionally? I don't think not, how could

it? Everybody's going through the same thing. So even though at times it seemed hard by today's standards, we just looked on it as -- it was eventful, very eventful. And it got to the point where we became teenagers, we made it eventful. We just didn't sit on it, you know.

In terms of the school system, the thing I appreciate most about it, other than the fact that Dewey School gave my sisters and I and my mother a very good education, sound basics. They had a woman there I'll never forget, was the librarian. Her name was Mrs. Waller. And she made reading a joy. She made going to the library a joy. And I re- Mrs. Waller, when I would go into her library, I recollect even in kindergarten going to the library, and certainly as we moved up into the higher grades, she ran a library program that just welcomed youngsters into the library and made it seem like a special place.

So in addition to learning to read well, I developed an appreciation for reading and I guess by the time I was out of Dewey School, no telling how many books I read. I used to follow the mobile van through the neighborhood when it would come, check out library books in the summer. I'd go to the public library. I'd go to the school library. I

had probably had read hundreds of books by the time I got out of Dewey School, and the end result is over the years I've been an avid reader or thousands of just books, just books, just reading. Reading is one of my major pastimes.

And for every now and then I wish I could somehow thank Mrs. Waller to just not to be a non-descript adult who she crossed as a kid. But you know, whatever she did in that library, some of us need to thank her, my sisters and I all of them. Because it must have been something in our family, I know we had Grandma Taylor who was very literate. We had certain kinds of backing in our family even though people were not that formally educated, that well educated. Grandma Taylor in particular reinforced reading. And my mother, even though she was overworked and overburdened, made sure we had the time, the materials and whatever else to read and enjoy reading.

So other than the fact that I used to play baseball and do all kind of odd jobs in the neighborhood, and ice skate in the winter and just have a ball in the summer and whatever, I would read a lot as a kid. That's probably the biggest thing that came out of Dewey School for me, other than the fact that it was always a happy place, always.

And all three of us were fortunate to have gone there at that time. And it was an old-fashioned school, old-fashioned school building with wood floors and things you don't see now. Old classrooms with bay windows, and you could see clearly to the outside, so it was just a pleasant place to be.

Our teenage years were different though. If you were black and you came from our neighborhood and you didn't have a job you weren't worth your salt if you were a man, a male. And that's simply the way it was. Not for everybody, don't get me wrong, but for us. For those of us who came from Church Street and that area we were [00:25:00] poor but we aspired to be something other than poor.

Quite a few of the kids I grew up with in that area came from Mississippi, from Weir County and various other places in Mississippi. And there were two or three of them that came up here that were older than we were, but like they might have been old enough to be in fifth and sixth grade, but in those days Dewey School or Evanston school district would test you for reading, and wherever you what level you read at, that's where they place you. So we wound up with

quite a few older kids in our grade level, most of them from the Deep South. And we all became fast friends.

At first we used to laugh at them because they were bigger than us and older than us and we'd call them dummies and so forth and so on. But once we found out they could play baseball and football and they could chuck balls and they could, as they were strong and they were fast and whatever else. You know, they became right away part of the group. And not only that, they were nice people. Their parents were just like ours, poor and struggling. Most of them went on to college.

So it was that kind of a -- you know, as we grew into teens, we all became paperboys. You know, the word would be "Hey man, where can I find some work so I can have some money so I don't have to be ragged so I can get out of here and the girls would notice me and whatnot." You know, that kind of thing. So if we were going to do that we had to have money. So we'd get an odd job here and an odd job there and if you got a job as a paperboy that was really something.

So quite a few of us went to work for Maxi Rose, down at South End News, you ever hear of it? You ever hear of Maxi Rose? He used to pick us up in a Cadillac convertible and have all little black kids all over the top of his convertible, sitting in the trunk, everywhere. Come through the ghetto early in the morning picking up black kids. And I guess we made him rich and he made us, not prosperous, but he made us able. I guess he employed mostly black folks. We used to call him -- and I don't mean this in a derogatory sense, but we didn't know any better than -- we used to call him Maxi Rose, king of the Jews, made his money on the daily news. And you ever heard that?

Q1: No I don't think so.

CT: You never heard that, yeah OK. But word would get around. It would usually be the southern boys that would land these jobs first because they were older and bigger. And when they'd get a job they'd pass the word onto us and then we'd get jobs. So we started a strange thing as teenagers of being hard workers, hard players in the proper sense, and good students. We tried to put all three of those things together.

Of course our parents had a lot of influence there, you know, especially the moms, you know, a lot of influence. And that's what we became. We worked our way through high school, we had good social time and we were good students. And that's how we went on into our young adulthood.

The Army got almost all of us except for one fellow, Robert Carter. Jabo came from Florida, and he went on to specialize in Latin and Greek. Last I heard he was teaching at Oxford University. But Jabo could barely speak English when he first -- we used to call him Cottonmouth. He came up here speaking like he had a mouth full of cotton, straight out of the delta country. He couldn't hardly speak, all he'd talk was geech, you know, but went on to become a master of Latin and Greek, if you can imagine that.

Most of us who went to work went to work at the post office. I got scared of that. I realized that if I stayed there much longer after getting out of high school, I'd probably wind up getting married and being there the rest of my life without seeing the world. So I jumped on into the Army and went off to see the world. Glad I did too. And believe it or not, never went back to Evanston to live

except for a short stint. Nothing wrong with Evanston mind you, [00:30:00] just never did. I got out and wanted to see other things; that was in me. I think a lot of that came from the reading and from some of the older men in my family who --

Q1: So you enlisted in the Army about what year was that?

CT: Sixty, 1960, I was 20 years old. I got out of high school, went to work for the post office for about two years, and then went in the Army, scared of Evanston, scared of getting tied down. And quite a few of my friends got drafted. The rest of them either went on to college or stayed in Evanston, got married like I thought they would. Now they've been divorced a couple times and whatever else. But that's natural, that's par for the course.

When I came back to Evanston it was changing. It changed tremendously when I came -- when I got out of the Army and especially by 1970. The little Evanston ghetto there on Church and Dodge literally burned itself out of business and never recouped. To this day it hasn't recouped. All they got is some barber shops there. Grocery stores are gone, the restaurant Monticello's, you heard of Monticello's, where the parking lot is now from the high

school? That was -- Monticello's is gone. They burned the
lumber yard down, it rebuilt, but --

Q1: When you say they burnt the lumber yard, burnt the area
down, physically burnt down like a --

CT: Yeah.

Q1: -- a riot or --

CT: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. You ever talked to Donald Walton?

Q1: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

CT: Could I? I was gone, I was away from Evanston. All I know
is when I got back, let me see, I lived on the south side
of Chicago for quite a few years, '63 to '67, '68. And
then also the time I was in the Army, from '60 to '63.
Let's see, by the time I got out of the Army -- well I saw
Evanston's downtown begin to integrate. Many of the
restaurants as you know, they didn't allow blacks. Many
did but many didn't, the higher class places didn't. But
everything began to break down, you know.

More blacks coming into the university, Northwestern.
Fifty-eight, no not '58, '59 and '60 they had great
football teams over there at Northwestern, mostly because
of the black players that they had recruited. Willmer
Fowler, Ron Burton, Fred Williamson who later became The
Hammer and went into movies, Irv Cross, A&E Kimbrough, Sam

Johnson, all these guys came to Northwestern and more. And that laid down some foundation at the university for -- these athletes laid the foundation for the coming of other students.

Let's see, what else? Oh, I recall when I was overseas getting a letter from my sister saying that Aunt Sarah had gone on a march in Evanston against the banks. I guess it was OK in Evanston if you saved and put money in the bank, but only an elect few could have access to services like loans and mortgages and whatnot. So it's good enough for us to put our money in, but it wasn't good enough for us to work in, or to get loans from and whatnot. So the black folks got smart I guess and started marching on downtown Evanston. Including my old aunt, who had quite a bit of money put up in them banks. And when I got (pause) went to open a checking account there were black people working in the bank. I was shocked. You know, other than the maids and the (inaudible) and whatnot.

Then it's at that time during the civil rights movement that young blacks would get angry and they'd threaten to burn down Monticello's properties. I guess they did on a couple of occasions [set it?] on fire. Donald Walton can

best tell you if you have -- have you interviewed him already? He would be a good source. He's a retired police officer. [00:35:00] He should still be there in Evanston, I haven't seen him. I used to see him around the high school a lot. He used to coach the tennis team.

But it's my understanding that Hines Lumber Yard, when Walton was a relatively new police officer, gave him their upstairs apartment over the office so that he could serve double-duty as a watchman and a tenant. And but I guess that didn't work because they burnt it down, and I guess Hines was out of business for a while. But they eventually brought it back, you know, it's certainly been a going concern for some time. It was one of those places that didn't hire any black folks; right in the black neighborhood didn't hire any black folks.

You ever hear of Nellie's Coal Yard? That's where strange engineer, Strange Engineering, Strange Electronics or Engineering, and what's the name of the waste management place? Not Triple A, but... I can't re-- Active Service, Active Service on the north side of Church Street there, that was Active Service and Strange, I think it was Strange Electronics or Engineering, that whole area there. That

was Nelly's Coal Yard. Well they employed a lot of black men there. But coal went out of business when oil for instance came in. So that went out of business.

So there wasn't that much work in the community and of course black folks were frustrated, you know, so they burned down everything and (inaudible) anything. There was a beautiful animal hospital there, North Shore Animal Hospital, and they employed a few black people from the neighborhood, but the neighborhood got so rough eventually that people wouldn't bring their dogs there. It was quite well-known; people from all over the north shore would bring their pets there. That's gone out of business.

Mostly everything that was productive in those days is gone now. And the only thing that I've seen replace it is barber shops. The only thing that seems to stick, you know?

Q1: When you lived in Evanston what church did you belong to?

CT: I never belonged to any particular church. My Grandma Taylor was a devout Christian, but that's as far as you could label her. She was certainly devout. She taught us the bible and she was very knowledgeable of the bible and she would teach all the major lessons from the bible to us.

But we, in our area they would send us to Bethel AME, Sunday school. I don't recall any adults going to church in my family, very rarely.

But then the Christian Science church began to open up to black people. And Grandma Taylor, even though she had no more than a 6th grade education, as I told you was very literate, and she liked to read a lot. And she began to read and study Mary Baker Eddy. She was a day worker, and I don't know -- I think it was quite possible that one of the family she worked for was Christian Science, I recall something like that -- and they introduced her to it. And she would begin to go to the Christian Science church, and I'd hear her talk to the adults in the family about it.

Well, my sisters and I started going to the Christian Science Sunday school, the *First Church* -- the only time that I went to church in Evanston purposefully was when I would go to Sunday school at the First Church of Christian Science. And that's at the corner of Grove and Chicago Avenue. And the people there treated us very nicely, and since we were well-read, it's a religion that you had to study. There were no preachers. To this day I have a problem with being preached to. You had to study it. And

it was a [00:40:00] very calm, a very spiritual religion. And believe it or not, my sisters and I took to it quite readily, even as teenagers.

Now we were sort of isolated from the rest of the black community in some ways. There was another black family, the Cross family, their children went there, so that's how I met Billy Cross and Chucky Cross and his sisters and whatnot. We all became friends later on. So that's my church experience, the one I feel strongest about in Evanston was at the Christian Science church. I later got away from it, partly because of the Army and -- Christian Science taught us at that time that all people were spiritually the same under God.

But Kristin, my sister right under me, had a little white friend in her Sunday school class who went south for a summer, and this was back in the '50s. And when she went to the Christian Science church down there, she asked, I guess she asked a question like "Well where were the black people?" And they told her that the black people couldn't go to their church. And so the girl I guess started reciting chapter and verse of what Mary Baker Eddy had to say about you know, how we were all one under God and they

told her that might work up here but it didn't work down there at that time.

And so Kristin began to develop a problem with it and whatnot. We didn't blame the people up here for that, they were all very nice. But we were beginning to see that the country had dual, triple standards, you know. But I got away from it mainly because I just outgrew, went different places and in the Army and all of that, you know.

I never took on willingly never took on another religion until I became a Baha'i 30 years ago. And I had to come back to Evanston to do that.

Q1: When you came back to Evanston, you came back in the '70s right?

CT: I came back when I got out of the Army in the early '60s, got married to my first wife and moved out within a year, less than a year I was gone after getting discharged from the Army, and living on the south side. But we got divorced about five years later, four years later, and I came back to Evanston. I was a college student by then, and I lived at home with my mother for a few months. Then I packed up and went to California. And Bonnie and I got married out there. And then, after almost two years out

there, we came back this way for me to finish school and to work at the Baha'i National Center there on Willamette, and we moved into Glencoe. And that was in 1971 we moved into Glencoe, and I've been in Glencoe, except for the times that I lived in California, I've been in Glencoe ever since, not in Evanston.

Q1: What college did you go to?

CT: I started, well my mother sent me off to Michigan State in 1958 with 200 dollars, and that was it. That was the best she could afford, and that lasted me till about the middle of November. And so I came on home and I never got back to college until I was 26 years old.

And I started then at Kendall College, which was a liberal arts junior college in Evanston. And I did really well there, transferred to Roosevelt, did well there, and by the end -- I never paid -- all my college was paid for. If I paid two semesters of tuition it was because I didn't submit my paperwork on time. All my college was from the military and from scholarships and whatever. Even through my master's degree. I'm getting ready to go back and take some courses this summer, I'm still looking -- I've got veteran's benefits. So everything was paid for.

Bonnie and I moved out to California and then came back here and then I went to UIC and finished there in 1974. By then I was pretty much removed from Evanston as a [00:45:00] you know, it was no longer even in my orbit of social life and whatnot.

I have a very good friend there, Charles Glass, he has since moved to Atlanta, but other than Charles, it wasn't that I cut my ties from Evanston, I just like gone other places, that's all. Now I'm very much involved in it.

Q1: When did you start working at Evanston Township High School?

CT: Nineteen eighty-one, September. I had applied there in 1980 and I was offered a job there but I didn't take it because the Baha'i National Center asked me to please stay. They wanted me to help them develop some things, so I did. And then in 1981 I was offered the same job and I took it. And so I came there in '81, been there ever since.

Q1: (inaudible)

CT: Mm-hmm, social studies, history, plan on retiring in four years.

Q1: As you look back on your life, who do you think were your major influences? Who do you feel was a major influence in your life?

CT: You mean outside of the family or in the family?

Q1: In and outside the family. Who do you think made
(inaudible) on the inside and helped you on the outside?

CT: Well, I'd have to give it to the women. It's not that the men in my family were weak, it's just, well maybe because the women outlived them? Didn't complain as much as they did. The women were our great protectors and providers. It's almost, like, even though we were young we knew the men didn't have half a chance. But the women were somehow safe, you know? So my mother and grandmothers, they just literally raised the family, at some point without the provisions from the men at all.

Uncle Billy was able to help us buy a home as a family in Evanston. But even his great source of guidance was his wife, Aunt Sarah. She taught him how to save money and made him pinch pennies and whatnot. They were rather well-off because of her. So I just got to give it to the ladies, and I'm thankful for one thing. I helped take care of all those old ladies as they got old and passed on out of here.

That was a problem for my first wife. Every Thursday I would be off from work, and I'd get off from school, from

college, early in the afternoon. I'd go take care of Grandma Taylor and Aunt Sarah. They were old, they needed someone to take them to the grocery store and see that they got their Social Security benefits, and got them back and forth to the doctor and things like that, you know. I'm glad I was able to pay back some of that, but those women were, they were the source of whatever was good for us. You know Linda, Jean's mother? She'd tell you the same thing. So you know, it's like hats off to these ladies. They were like strong women -- strong.

That's why we can't understand some of these things that we see today. You know, we can't understand why some of the boys are like they are when we see their mothers struggling for them and things like that, you know what I mean? We knew that back in our time, it was a matter of life and death. Women working like that was bad on their health, you know, they didn't have much source of happiness. But they didn't complain and bitch and moan and whine and whatnot, you know, someone like my mother and she made it into her middle ages and was able to have a decent income and able to begin to travel and whatnot, we were very glad for that.

[00:50:00] The rest of the old -- Aunt Sarah died. She was provided for, she provided for herself, but Grandma Taylor and my other grandmother, they were poor, broke and destitute. But we took care of them. We were able to turn some of that around. But give it to the women. It's hard on the men. I don't even know the men. I won't see them till I get to the next world. I never got a chance to know them. Like I said, my dad was 44 when he died, and I had to part ways with him when I was a teenager. He was an alcoholic, and it was either me or him, you know it was one of those things.

But, you know -- all that has to go back to slavery. You know as I became an adult, and it wasn't even in the early adulthood, it was my middle years I began to realize what had happened to these men, you know. So much so that -- so that for the young people you know like GG and Andre, Kelsey and Jamie, we began to take -- and all of a sudden we found we had in our family all of these boys, you know, about to become men. And so we began to take special care of them so that they would not become afflicted like our older generation of men did, you know.

It's a family full of bite, able, capable men who just couldn't do nothing. They just weren't allowed to do anything. All of our kids have met with a fair amount of success. I've got one wild child here.

Q1: There's always one wild child in every family.

CT: You think so?

Q1: I think there's one in every family.

CT: Well he's wild but he's got his talent. You saw him there doing what he did up at Gene's house. He's got his abilities and talents and whatnot. More people call on him than call on me, you know because of what he can do. But he's just wild, just like the old -- we tell him "Man you're gonna wind up just like the old dudes." And you know, maybe he will and maybe he won't.

But it's great to see these young men go through college, pick up whatever skills that they get, whether its craftsman skill like Jamison or professional skills like yourself and Gene and Kelsey and whatnot. To see them get married and have intact families and do all of those things? It took a long time to get to that, long time. So we're all very proud of that. And maybe the old men can, maybe they can see it, you know. But if it weren't for the

women... Used to be a train line ran right across the street here. You ever hear of the old North Shore Line?

Q1: Yeah.

CT: So the women could work up here late in this area, in the north shore, and then catch that train home. Wasn't for that north shore train, a lot of these women wouldn't have been able to get back and forth, the men too for that matter, when they worked late. Every now and then -- you know it's a bike path now -- every now and then I get out there on my bike and I wonder -- we used to say prayers for like my mother, she'd come home on the 1:30 train, you know, by herself and whatnot. If there wasn't a cab in downtown Evanston she's have to walk to the house. Thank God things were safe in those days.

But every now and then I'm out on that bike ride, I say "I don't know how you did it mom. I'm out here in the middle of the day riding a bike and here you used to catch a train at one o'clock in the morning just to get home from a job." So it was that kind of stuff. If it hadn't been for those women were strong! I don't know how much you heard about that, about the women in -- the black women in Evanston?

Q1: Well, I'd [get it?] from a lot of the interviews I was been doing.

CT: Yeah, yeah, well it may be a national phenomenon too.

Q1: [I'm learning all kinds of things?]. But then again some of that was a lot of the men too that I've interviewed, those who --

CT: Were successful.

Q1: -- especially in (inaudible) --

CT: Oh yeah.

Q1: -- multiple hats.

CT: Yeah, oh yeah they had to, they had to.

Q1: From family life to social (inaudible) --

CT: Yeah.

Q1: -- so it was just [passing on the hat?].

CT: It used to be, I guess, I couldn't see it too much because of where we were, the kind of neighborhood we lived in, the kind of people we were. But as I became a teenager [00:55:00] and my circle of friends spilled beyond the neighborhood, I would meet a lot of black men that I would have a lot of respect for, and they all wore many different hats. But even they were beaten down.

One of my heroes was Doc Glass, I don't know if you've ever heard of him. He was one of my heroes. But Doc Glass was a multi-talented man who, you know, just wasn't allowed to blossom. I mean, with all his great energy and efforts, he

became very well-known and prominent, but Doc Glass should have been a leader among people, you know. That's what he should have been. And the times just wouldn't allow it. Even the doctors, Doctor Penn and Doctor Bryant, Doctor Hill, all these people, they were leaders among people that wore many different hats. If they'd have been white they'd have been giants.

So we knew that. But you have to look at it this way. If the successful men had to put up with those pressures, think of what the weaker men had to put up with. Tom Butler, now he was a -- I remember him as a strong, forceful man. He ran the delivery business and I guess he had some other kind of business before that. His son, used to work with him, but the kind of work he did? That probably took him into old age 15 years before his time. Here was a hard-working, knowledgeable man who could use his mind. And we just saw a lot of that, you know.

Probably the one who had the most longevity, and seemed to be the most easy-going among the successful men that I knew of in Evanston was Doctor Penn. He just was an easy-going relaxed man. And I guess Doctor Penn lived to be 70, 80 years old. But other than that they all knew the pressure.

But the women in our family were so tough that they -- I mean it was unimaginable how tough they were. Didn't mean they didn't have broken hearts and all that kind of stuff. Yeah, they had all that, but they were just, you know there wasn't no such thing as sick time. It's time to get up and go to work. We've got to go do this for these kids, we have to keep, we've got to pull the rent together somehow and keep the cold out of the house, stuff like that.

And we never knew as kids, I mean we worried but we never really knew a worry because we knew that all emergencies were gonna be covered by these women. And that's what they did, they covered every single one of them. They never missed a one. And something I'm proud of, and don't you dare tell Linda this.

Q1: Do you want me to pause the tape?

CT: Yeah, pause it. There's a story I'd like to tell you before I finish up here about old Flugey. Oh, there was another thing too.

Q1: (inaudible) talk about, I guess Uncle Pete, Petey or I think that's the name of your uncle?

CT: A cousin, we had a cousin named Petey, yeah. Well I can, you know Evanston has strong connections with Idlewild Michigan. Have you heard of that?

Q1: Yes I have. Let me finish the tape and then --

CT: All right.

Q1: -- just going to take a while.

CT: Have you been to Idlewild?

END OF AUDIO FILE 1

CT: -- Flugey, even though it got to a point in our family where all the men were gone, Flugey stayed around because his wife, my grandmother, Emil Curry, had a stroke. And he stayed on at the house to help care for her till she died. I had gone in the Army, so I left mom at home with two teenage girls and Linda, Kristin and Linda were very attractive young girls and they worked hard, they had nice jobs, their grades were up. They were my mother's pride and joy. And Flugey, Flugey used to get drunk at least once every other week. But he took care of my grandmother, and he was a man in the house, a man related to the family, which was important. And if anybody ever jumped wrong with him -- Flugey was an old man but he could hurt, he could hit people and hurt them. I've seen him do it before.

And there's a story that went around Evanston -- they call Flugey the old guys called him Rocking Chair because he had

a bad leg that he couldn't bend when he walked. And so it was stiff so he walked like he was rocking, so they called him Rocking Chair. And these old guys that'd come over, they'd all sit around the kitchen and drink, get drunk and tell all these old stories. Every now and then I'd listen to them. So the word was that back in the days, out on the canal banks, black folks used to gather out there and have picnics and things like that? You heard about that?

Q1: (inaudible).

CT: And they used to have boxing matches and stuff, and John Dixon, a man named John Dixon, was known to be the hardest-hitting man in Evanston. So word was that Flugy could hit harder than John Dixon, but nobody paid no attention to him because he was a gimp, he walked with a bad leg. So taken on a bet, as the story goes -- and I don't know if there's any truth to it -- some guys bet out on them canal banks one day, they used to play horseshoes and stuff like that, they probably got drunk out there in the noonday sun I can imagine. And the longer they were gone the louder it would get.

But some guys supposedly bet John Dixon he couldn't knock out a horse. And so John Dixon took the bet on and sure enough, knocked out one of Perron's horses, plough horse,

something like that. Well, the other bet that got carried on further that John Dixon couldn't knock out Flugey. And Flugey, according to the bet, wagered he'd knock Dixon out. So they had this big sparring match, and sure enough, Flugey knocked out John Dixon. Well now that's the way the story goes. These guys get around, sit around, they'd get so drunk and get to hollering and retelling this story. So I heard it all my life.

But anyway, one day a fellow came to take Linda out, and somehow, it was one of Linda's old boyfriends, but he got out of line and Flugey politely told him -- I was in the Army now -- Flugey told him it was time for you to leave Mickey. Mickey made a comment to the effect "Well there's nothing you can do old man." And Flugey told him "It's time to go boy." (laughs) And so I guess Mickey turned on Flugey and Flugey put him in the hospital with one shot. So this was, you know, it's like Kristen and Linda were -- it's not like they were unprotected. All the time when my dad was not there and I was gone, old Flugey, with his whiskey-tipping self, taking care of my sick grandmother, was a man around the house who did look after and protect them. I've seen him protect my mother. I've seen him do that with my own eyes.

So, you know, I may be hard on the men because they didn't have opportunities and they sort of succumbed to the pressures. But on one hand I'm [00:05:00] that way, but on the other hand we had to be thankful that some old half-drunk guy who loved his granddaughters saw to it that they were well taken care of.

In 1948, Flugey and my grandmother took me to Idlewild Michigan, crossed the lake on the ferry. That's my first real trip I remember doing anywhere, and I'll tell you there's a beautiful summer in Idlewild. All black folks having a good time in a resort area. You can't imagine what it was like. You just cannot imagine for an eight-year-old kid to see something like that, black folks from all over, from Minneapolis, South Bend, Detroit, Pontiac, Chicago, all over, everywhere, because in those days, you couldn't go many places, and so we had to have our own resorts and whatnot.

It was interesting. Wealthy black folks were there and so were poor black folks. Wealthy black folks needed serving classes, so how my grandmother and grandfather went was they went to be a cook and a butler at a black manor. So

they could bring me and my sisters along. So they got free room and board and pay, and we got to spend the summer in Idlewild, Michigan with the well-off black folks. And there wasn't much discrimination, social, you know. Once you got into town, it didn't matter who you were, really. If you could dance or you could swim or if you could fish or whatever, that was what it took as far as we knew.

And then we had a wealthy cousin up there, my mother's, that would be her first cousin, yeah her first cousin, her father's sister's boy. Peter Jones, his father was a big policy man in Chicago, Ed Jones. I don't know if you ever heard of him. Well, Ed Jones ran policy, he was a policy king on the south side between, as I understand 35th and 51st Street, in that area. I don't think black folks went much further than 51st Street in those days, maybe 63rd is about as far as we could go.

Ed Jones got run out of Chicago by the syndicate, who wanted to take over the policy. So Ed packed his family up and went to Mexico, and to my knowledge, Ed Jones spent the rest of his life and died in Mexico, exiled pretty much by the syndicate. But Petey still lived in Chicago, float between Mexico and Chicago, and shared some of his father's

wealth. He never shared it with anybody else in the family, but he was known to be a rather selfish person, but he had a home up there in Idlewild, a summer home. And Kristin and Linda and I, when we stayed in the little cabin one summer with our family, but the kids, as children we were allowed to go up to Petey's. He wouldn't let too much of the family come up there. But he let us kids come up.

And that summer's the only time I ever saw or had any relationship with Petey. You could tell he was rich he drove a Cadillac and all that kind, you know, Petey had money. At least at that time he did. I guess he's been long dead by now. But that was our only relationship that we ever had with Petey. We had more with his mother who was Aunt Lyd. She's long dead too, she's an old south side woman. Linda has pictures of her.

Q1: I think I saw those.

CT: Yeah, yeah, she could pass for white almost, yeah, that was Aunt Lyd till she opened her mouth to talk. (laughter) She couldn't pass for nothing but geechee after that, as my daddy would say. So that was our relationship with Petey. But I spent two summers in Idlewild, '48 and '51. And those were memorable summers.

Q1: Is Idlewild still up there?

CT: Yeah, it's, there's a black community there, but it's not a resort area. It's a hunting, fishing area now for [00:10:00] hunters, black, white or otherwise mainly. But I understand that there's -- I had a woman that taught school with me down here in Evanston who was from Idlewild, a white woman. And her mother taught school up there. And she would go to visit her mother once a month or so and I was quite surprised to find out that she was from Idlewild.

But she filled me in on recent happenings in Idlewild, and it's changed over. Believe it or not it's kind of like a wilderness area. And right in the middle of this wilderness area were these black resorts, Lake Idlewild and I'm trying to think of the other -- there was another lake that was a black resort area up there -- I can't remember it.

Baldwin had quite a few black people in it. So there were three or four towns that -- a whole county up there had a lot of black people. And I guess their descendants are still there. But as a resort area, we don't need resort areas anymore. Maybe we do, but you know, not for the same reasons that we had then. That was the only place you

could go then. Now you can go so many other places, you know.

Strange drive to get there, you couldn't stop to go to the bathroom or stop to get anything to eat along the way except maybe at a hamburger stand or something. Once you got there, you were all right.

Q1: While you were growing up, I'm just realizing, what do you remember, there was a newspaper called The Evanston Gazette.

CT: Uh-huh.

Q1: And I read an issue one day in there and it (Clayton coughs) "The Evanston Whiz Kids" --

CT: Uh-huh.

Q1: -- a group of kids that had motorcycles. Do you know anything about that or?

CT: No, I didn't. What year would that have been?

Q1: About, between '45 and '50, in between there.

CT: No I didn't. I didn't hear anything about them. They must have been over on the Foster side of town.

Q1: It was in Foster.

CT: Yeah. I knew that in the '50s Polly Glass used to go with a boy who had a motorcycle, used to drive her dad crazy. He'd pull up in front of the house and rev that motorcycle,

and she'd put on her black leather jacket and out she'd go. And Doc liked the guy, he just didn't like his daughter riding around on a motorcycle. (laughs) But other than that I don't recall anything. I know we had some black motorcycle cops, Harvey Barksdale and I think Bill Logan was a motorcycle cop for a while, maybe some more of the younger men as I remember, because they both came on in the early '50s on the police force. So they must have been motorcycle cops, all of them. But other than that I don't know of any. You ever hear of a guy named Jelly?

Q1: No.

CT: Jelly was a black man lived about the 1800 block of Dale, he lived on Dale just north of Church Street, on the west side of the street, right next to Bill Matthews Garage, now you've heard of that, right? And Jelly was a trucker, had his own truck. And Jelly used to walk a raccoon, he had a pet raccoon. All the people in the neighborhood knew Jelly. And Jelly was a ladies man. He was a well-known ladies man. (chuckles) But he was an old southern guy and he was the only one that I recollect that was any different in terms of something like that, him and his truck, out on the road. You know, that was, he was like almost like a folk hero to the kids. He'd let us climb on the truck; he

wouldn't let us get in it though. But other than that I haven't heard of anybody with motorcycles.

Q1: When you actually look through your time in Evanston, and what you experienced there, this is a multiple part of the question.

CT: Mm-hmm.

Q1: What are you (inaudible), what changes would you like to make?

CT: (sneezes) Excuse me. Well, not having known any better as a child, I'd never been so well protected by the black community; it did protect us you know. [00:15:00] As I go back in the years, I see nothing but good in Evanston. I'm not over-romanticizing. I'm just saying Evanston was very productive, very interesting place to be. It's like it took care of its own, but of course I know that things were segregated and people were oppressed in many ways and so forth and so on, and that came to me later. But it was just a pleasant place to live in those early years of my life.

If my family had to go through whatever they had to go through I'm glad they had a place like that to do it. It's the hardest thing. I can't imagine them living hard like that; let's say in the old south side of Chicago in the

tenement district. It would have been very rough for them. As well as they had supports, you know, Evanston did provide a lot of supports. I'll tell you how supportive it was, even the teachers who knew we were poor, would send work toward my mother and grandmother. Yeah, when they had little parties catered or ironing and things like that. They knew our folks needed money, so they'd send work towards her, send work their way.

It was kind of a patronizing thing to do, but we didn't look on it that way. They needed the money, we needed to eat, you know. So and those teachers showed us as much or more respect than anybody else. The things I see that I look on as bad, I see now. We've got a town full of churches, half of them black, drugs, prostitution, all kinds of stuff in the black neighborhood. And we're building more churches faster than any group in town, and ain't nobody doing nothing about what's going on with these kids. Somebody gets shot and killed and people show up in the school and so forth and so on. If there's some controversial thing then people show up. But in terms of the older generation being in touch with the younger generation, and being guiding lights and forceful

interveners and things like that, it seems like those days are gone.

That's why over there on Church Street, that's all we got, a barber shop. That's all we own. In many ways we were better off than than we are now. Maybe you've heard that before. I don't mean that to exaggerate, I'm not poor anymore. I don't want to go back that way. But I don't know how many kids from this generation are going to be able to contend with anything like the pressures that we had to contend with, and wind up in the places we wound up in. You know what I'm saying?

Q1: Mm-hmm.

CT: So somehow I wish the black community could bring itself together in a positive way. It's like this, I was telling the kids in an African American history course -- and this would be a good way to sum it up -- that you know what Family Focus is, right? They take care of the pregnant teen girls in Evanston, provide them with education, social workers, everything. Really a good organization I think. I don't know where a lot of those girls or their children would be without it. Well, years back I went to a benefit, a fundraising benefit for them, and of course the great

majority of people there were white, because you've got to solicit funds from the sources.

We certainly had a lot of black folks there, but the black folks were doing much of the soliciting of the white community. So I said to the kids in the class -- because a couple of the girls had gone through Family Focus -- they said "Why is that?" My attitude was this, I said "Probably, the black kids at this high school alone could raise 10 times the money amongst themselves to finance Family Focus, just the kids alone." "Oh, no we can't." "Oh yeah?" Everybody in there's got at least 100 [00:20:00] dollar shoes. The class was all black except the two white girls. (inaudible) And they're the only ones in there didn't have 100 dollar shoes.

I said "You know doggone well that you could, you have the way and the means to provide for the social welfare of our people in this community, of your peers, and you never give it any thought." So I thought, well maybe what I'm saying is unfair to the kids, but you know, if someone doesn't put things like this on their mind, they'll just continue, one generation after the other, not being productive in a collective sense. Maybe individually, yes, but in a

collective sense I think Evanston used to be a whole, black Evanston used to be a whole lot more productive in a collective sense.

It had to be. It provided its own hospital, all this kind of stuff, you know what I mean? So I think that's the shame of Evanston right now. I try to tell the kids, "How in the world can we go through life killing each other? For every one we kill, two or three of us go to jail. How can we do that? How can we line up with creating generations of babies and the fathers don't even put a dime toward their well-being, right here in Evanston." So, you know, I take a hard look at it that way. I see great potential with all these bright kids, can't shake them loose. Whatever's got them has got them.

Now that may not be a local phenomenon, again, that may be part of a national phenomenon. But I do think that in Evanston a lot is missing now; parental guidance, community love and care, concern. Churches everywhere, but for every church there's a drug dealer standing right outside, except on [Holy Court?]. I don't know what it is about Holy Court, you know. But other than that, there's all this stuff going on, and the ministers can't seem to come

together and -- they'll preach about it, but in terms of doing anything ongoing, I don't hear it. I don't see it. And then again, maybe that isn't their role, that isn't their job, I don't know. But a lot is missing.

Sometimes I'm over at that high school late at night and I'm seeing committees meet, parent committees, parent committees making all kinds of decisions about the school and whatnot. Over the years I've seen those meetings go on, there might not be a single black person involved in it. We can't get black kids involved in -- there's a woman, Mrs. Zimmerman who heads up community service. She's always trying to get black kids involved in community service ideas, activities, because a lot of them are in the black community. And she can get a few, a hardcore dedicated few. Seems like they'd rather party in the halls than be observant of what's going on in their own community.

So that point I made to those youngsters, every single one of them was in here, that "Every single high school kid in here, every black high school kid, has the wherewithal to support Family Focus 10 times over. We could give, you could give 20 dollars a month." And you know darn --

because I watched a kid spend 10 dollars a week on candy right there in the school. So there's this sense of purposeful sacrifice for bettering ourselves that's just missing, just lacking.

Like I told you, it's even like this. "Hey man, you want a job? I know where one is." "Yeah, hook me up man." That whole thing, where you get a whole community of boys working, just hook me up. Folks ain't getting hooked.

Q1: No, they're getting hooked up on beepers and cell phones now.

CT: Yeah, yeah. And in actuality they need to get hooked up in the community, support their children, all these things that it takes to take the kids through the stages so they can develop properly. Kids can't even defend themselves properly. You don't believe it? You want to take your recorder [00:25:00] your camera and your stuff, take two or three mornings, and go out to Cook County Court out there in Skokie, and watch the Evanston youngsters come through that court system. You won't believe your eyes. You won't believe the things you see and hear coming out Evanston. And that's the way I see it right now. I see a lot of bright youngsters making progress, but I see -- even that progress I see as partly negative, because nobody's saying

"Well, let's go back and try to do something." It doesn't mean you have to be poor and make great sacrifice, it means you have to, people have to do things like what you're doing. Or people need to realize that they can -- that their vocations and avocations can somehow be productive for their people. You know what I'm saying?

Q1: Mm-hmm.

CT: Things like that, things that we had to have, that we used to have out of necessity that are gone now. Maybe someday they can get back to them. But that's where I am.

Q1: Thank you very much. I'm going to stop the tape here.

CT: All right.

END OF AUDIO FILE