



Oral History Interview of
Abdur Rashada

Conducted 9 September 1999 by Dr. Michelle S. Johnson

MJ: So once you left were there any repercussions once you had left? Did they have it against your family?

AR: No, no. I guess you know things went pretty smooth. They looked for me but I was gone and I left my wife and my little son and I came here, I got a job at Malleable right across the river here and then I sent and got my wife and my son and so we've been here ever since.

MJ: I'll just start by asking you to state your full name and date of birth for the record.

AR: My name is Abdul Raheem Rashada. Date of birth 12-17-25.

MJ: Okay where were you born?

AR: Starkville, Mississippi.

MJ: Starkville, Mississippi? That's Mississippi State?

AR: Yes.

MJ: Yeah. You were born in 1925? Who were your parents?

AR: My father's name was Frank Tait. My mother's name was Mary Ethel and her maiden name was Mil Tait.

MJ: Do you know their dates of birth?

AR: No I don't know. I have it somewhere but I don't.

MJ: Now were they both born and raised in Starkville?

AR: Yes.

MJ: What kind of work were they doing in Starkville?

AR: My father was a farmer. Just a private just for himself. He was not a big farmer just a farmer that did enough to support his family of nine children.

MJ: So you had eight brothers and sisters?

AR: Yes.

MJ: Where did you fall? Oldest, youngest, middle?

AR: Exactly.

MJ: Middle.

AR: It was, it was nine of us and I was the middle child. It was two boys older than me, two boys younger than me, two girls older than me and two girls younger than me.

MJ: So when you said exactly . . .

AR: Yes.

MJ: So what kind of farming? You said he did more small scale?

AR: Just small scale just to support his family yes. And at the time when I was coming up the farm was something like cotton, corn and he had like he dealt with hay you know for the animals and he had . . . we raised a lot of little things like peanuts, sweet potatoes and things like that. Sugar cane that they would make or process into making molasses you know. And he raised hogs and my mother raised a lot of chickens and let's see. We had milk cows where they would milk the cows and sell the milk. You know that's how he would come by a little money by selling the milk. Milk the cows and we would just milk the cows and put the milk into a can and we lived maybe half a mile from the main road where a truck, well we would take the milk in a can to the road and just sit it on a stand there and a truck would come by and pick up the milk and take it to the city to the creaming or where ever they processed. And then the 15th and 1st of the month they would pay him for the milk so he would have a check coming twice a month.

MJ: So would the cans be marked with his name or something so they would know? How would they keep track of how many cans he had?

AR: Yeah. See the guy that picked up the milk he knew just like my dad when he take the milk out like in a 10 gallon can they had a little stand, nobody's milk would be there but his okay so they just know that this was his milk and yes, they had his name on the can too and then when they take it to the creamery they just take it off and the milk go in and they had the name on the can and then that way they would, when they would weight the milk or whatever they would put down the amount that we had.

MJ: So would they bring the can back?

AR: Yeah everyday he would bring a can back and pick up a can.

MJ: So this was a daily thing?

AR: A daily thing, every day. And there was a lot of people doing, people all along the road you know and it was a guy that just come along and pick up the milk you know. And he charged a fee for picking up the milk.

MJ: Oh so he didn't work for the creamery?

AR: No he got his pay from the people that he was picking up the milk from, see because if you wanted to sell the milk you could take it yourself if you wanted to. And it was a job for a person to say hey I'll pick up the milk for everybody and he would come along with his truck and pick up the milk for everybody and then they would pay him the first of the month, otherwise some how I think it was . . . somehow they pay, I'm thinking the creamery, whoever they paid these people that picked up the milk. They gave them to bring the milk in they had a way of calculating how much this you know milk get brought in some way and made a check out.

MJ: So the guy that picked it up would get paid both by the creamery and by them?

AR: No he would get paid by the creamery but they would take the money out of . . .

MJ: I see what they paid the people that put the milk out?

AR: That's right. Yup so that would eliminate people, him trying to collect from everybody and some people paying him and some . . .

MJ: Right so how many cows, dairy cows did you have?

AR: My dad had about 15 cows.

MJ: So 15 cows generated enough milk to give your family all the cash that you needed?

AR: Um hum. And then the end of the year then my father, by him being a farmer on a small scale he would have maybe two or three bails of cotton where he would sell the cotton and that's where he would get a nice lump sum of money and he would buy all our warm clothes and things for school and everything when he got this money in the fall of the year.

MJ: Did he own his land? How much land was he working?

AR: Yes well my dad had about 100 acres of land. And some of it was in pasture for the cow and some of it was in like hay you know hay and then he farmed some and some was maybe wood or timber, people every once in a while where the trees grow in somebody with a saw mill or something you know to take or come in and buy the trees you know and cut them down and process lumber.

MJ: Was there a local . . . do you remember a local saw mill in the area?

AR: Yes it was some people in there that had a saw mill and they would come in and they . . . he has some timber or trees you know, come in and buy the trees and cut them down.

MJ: How did your father acquire the 100 acres?

AR: Okay that's a story too. During slavery time you know there was a slave master, some of them was kind enough to will property to the slaves like when they die that was on the plantation. Because some of the slaves were like children and they would will . . . Camile don't bother me please now okay . . .and so my fathers' grandfather was a child of the slave master.

MJ: Do you remember his name?

AR: My fathers' grandfather?

MJ: Um hum.

AR: Jerry Tait.

MJ: Jerry Tait.

AR: And he was a little boy, he was small when the slaves was freed or whatever. But anyway he received some land from the slave master he received 100 acres of land.

MJ: So it was a big plantation before that?

AR: Yes it was but my fathers' grandfather was the one that you know got the 100 acres of land. Okay some of the other people did also. Now my father, his father and mother was not married okay and my father's mother died at childbirth so my father's grandfather did just like I'm doing these children, raise my father. And when he passed my father was an only child and he was the grandson but he raised him and he inherit this land you see. And today we still have some of the land because when my father and mother passed well then that land was divided between the children.

MJ: Between the nine?

AR: Between the nine children yes.

MJ: So did you retain your portion of the land?

AR: Yes it's down there you know. It's just some land that I have that I probably will never use but because it was . . . I just let it stay there and I didn't want to get rid of it and it's just staying in the family, they not doing anything with it either but it's just there. I pay taxes on it too.

MJ: So why did you decide not to get rid of it?

AR: I just . . . I never thought of it and it's been about . . . maybe my mother passed in 19

___: 1981.

AR: '81 I think.

___: I remember on that one thing you have.

AR: Okay I think it was '81 when she passed.

MJ: I see you got a historian in the family?

AR: Yes. And so and when she passed for some reason yes, but this was my mother and her birth date is here too. I did this myself.

MJ: September 6th.

AR: Yes.

MJ: 1898. So was this an anniversary of her birth then, couple days ago? Few days ago.

AR: Um hum.

MJ: That's beautiful.

AR: Yeah I did that.

MJ: So you wrote this?

AR: I bought this right here from . . . I bought this from a person that had a . . . from this guy here.

MJ: (Cannot understand)

AR: Uh hu and he have a lot to write on this but the picture and everything and all this information I put it in here.

MJ: This is beautiful. So did she ever leave Mississippi?

AR: No when she took sick in '79 I think it was I went and got her and I brought her here and I kept her and took care of her. And I took care of her until she passed then I had her shipped back home and buried. Put that back in there. Thank you.

__ : Your welcome.

MJ: So how old were you when you left Mississippi?

AR: 23 years old I'm thinking.

MJ: So what was it like in Starkville when you left?

AR: Segregated bad, real bad. And I was . . . I don't know what you would call it but I had to leave because at that time the white people would just go crazy when you were man enough to say no to them you know. And so I had been in service, I was in World War II and with my experience and the way my dad brought me up I've never been one to buckle to nobody, I've never been that way because I didn't have to. I worked for my dad all the time I never worked for nobody because I didn't have to. But my brothers, all of my brothers when they got to a certain age and went to work for the dollar for their paycheck dad didn't care but if they wanted to work with him they could. And I was the one that chose to work with my father because we did like we wanted to do and I liked that. So I went in service at 18 years old and I was in the Navy, I served in the South Pacific and spent 17 months on the water on a transport ship.

MJ: Seventeen months straight?

AR: Yeah seventeen months. Well you see we have a station on this ship okay. We would go to and fro from places in the South Pacific and sometimes we would have a chance to get off you know for a little liberty but then come right back to the ship. But my home was on that ship for 17 months. And so when I was discharged I went back home and I got married and they had a . . . I didn't get too much schoolin', I stopped school early at about 9th grade or something like that so when I got out of the service they would pay you to go to school so I started back to high school and mostly for the pay you know, the pay check and I got married so I decided I wanted to . . . my wife got pregnant and she had a little boy and I wanted to supplement my little income then by getting a little job there at the state college. And I only worked there for two days I guess before one of the students wanted to whoop me.

MJ: White student?

AR: Yes because he said it was some of us . . . all we was permitted to do at the dormitory at that time was to clean up. And he was in his room when he should have been in class and we was laughing and talking and we was going from room to room cleaning up and sweeping, etc. and so he said we woke him up and he came out you know and was talking and at that time they would say things to you that you didn't like. He said I wish you niggers would hush so much of this fuss so that's what he said. And so I asked him you know something to say who you talking to fella? I'm talking to you you know and he called me and he said he would kick my . . . you know, and I said no sir you won't kick me mister you know. And so I guess he said I'll show you. And when he walked to me like they usually do them people then I had the push broom, the push broom was wooden and I just flipped it and I hit him right here and when he fell I tried to stomp his wits out and I had to leave because I knew they were going to kill me. And when he came to enough to go out and tell it then a mob of them got together and started looking for me to kill me and I had a brother here so my parents told me to leave. So I left and I came here. That was in '49.

MJ: Did you ever go back?

AR: Oh I've been back 100 times but I guess I was here for maybe 10 years before I went back. I was here for a long time before I went back so finally I went back and I've been doing back because you know I've been having death in the family and different things . . . go away now, I'm talking okay. Go now, get on out . . .

MJ: So once you left were there any repercussions once you had left? Did they have it against your family?

AR: No, no. I guess you know things went pretty smooth. They looked for me but I was gone and I left my wife and my little son and I came here, I got a job at Malleable right across the river here and then I sent and got my wife and my son and so we've been here ever since.

MJ: So you got a job at Malleable in 1949?

AR: Malleable yes.

MJ: So what was it like at Malleable in 1949.

AR: Real bad.

MJ: What kind of work were you doing?

AR: Real bad, real bad okay. I had a job that you call I was a hook out man so to speak.

MJ: Hook out man?

AR: Hook out man that's what they call it. On a job they call it the hot line okay. And it was like a big conveyor belt bringing iron and they brought iron out of the foundry, they had a big what you would call a long line with big heavy containers you know that they loaded iron in in the foundry.

MJ: Was it hot iron?

AR: Yes hot iron like when they pulled the iron and then that iron set up there and then they shook it out on what they call a shake out or whatever and then they loaded it in these big heavy containers and then they come around on a conveyor corner belt and then they dump it on this line and then we would have to . . . and then they had guys that would knock the _____ off it and then they had this long line of all different kinds of iron and then the iron coming by you and they had a big place behind you where you hook off with these iron hooks, hook the iron off and put it over you know behind you in these bins okay. Now it was a bad job because they could change jobs when they got ready. It was not a job that if you did this job you know you got a job to do you do it and that's all you had to do. They was constantly changing patterns and the supervisor constantly coming around and telling you, you know, you taking off as much iron as you can take off now, you know you maybe taking off maybe two or three different kinds and then they got another place over here where they will change patterns and another job coming in, they would tell you another job be coming in and I'll say well I'll put it over here and you're already getting as much as you can get but they could add to you, you know, come in and if you don't do it they send you home, discipline you and send you home, mess with you. So it was a bad job and I was one that if I knew I had enough work

already and it was hot and the foreman came along and told me, he says you know another job coming in and I ain't got a place so put it over here and I tell him I'm taking off all I can take off. Well you got to get it you know. And he be standing there waiting till the job come through you know so he can point to it and tell you to get it. If you don't get it he going to send you home. So I would just half get them you know. Get some and let some go. And they would send me home a lot of times. I never would do what they wanted me to do so I worked on different jobs. I worked on that particular job maybe 15 years.

MJ: On the hook out?

AR: Yeah on the hook out for maybe 15 years you know and I don't know how I live hardly because they were sending me home. They sent me home about as much as I worked because I never would do the job. But they had this committee man, they had the union and the committee man and you could get them and they would write out a grievance for you, you know, and they would send you home for two days and call you and tell you to come back to work you know. So sometimes they would send me home so much the foreman would be wondering how I live you know because I worked about half of the time because I never would do what they wanted me to do. I would do what I thought was right.

MJ: So would that be like three, like different bins so there would be like and so you would be pulling off two and then they want to add a third one?

AR: Another one that's right. You got the idea. You may be taking off three already, different kinds and you got three places that you putting these and now they got another job coming and then you got another place close by and so another job coming in and put it over here. And you already can't handle what you got see and so I had a lot of problem because of the way I was brought up not to just, you know, I was not afraid and I would buckle to everything they wanted me to do so you know they was always you know sending me home and whatever.

MJ: Let me ask one more question, on this hot line was it mostly black folks and Latino's or?

AR: Yes, yes, yes, It was mostly blacks and Mexicans you know. Just mostly blacks you see because they had jobs there naturally at that time that they didn't allow us on you see.

MJ: And what was that kind of jobs?

AR: And for us to like . . . this is the thing that used to happen to me. I would do this okay. Once every year they would take inventory. And they would have a big pile of iron maybe almost as big as this house you know, this great big pile of iron, outside, that they wanted to count you know and take inventory and they would put a lot of boxes all around this big pile of iron and put a group of us African Americans out there and tell us to put the iron in the box and count

the iron as you put it in the box and when you get 100 you have the white boy over there with the pad so when you get 100 tell him and he would write it down. So when they tell me you know to do that I would say I can't count. Oh yeah you can count. I say oh no, no, no you don't believe I can count. And he would say yeah you can count. I would say you really believe I can count? Yeah. I say well give me the pencil. He wouldn't give me the pencil so I wouldn't count. So what he always do with me he take me to a pile of mix iron and then he would say well put every kind in a pile you can do that can't you? And I would tell him oh yeah I can do that. But I never would count. No, no, you can't get give me the pencil, you don't believe I can count. If you believe I can count give me the pencil. So no, no he wouldn't give me the pencil. So I came up like that you see. And then they had like when the line break down or something, when you on the line and the line break down or something they always had some little dirty job that they wanted you to do while they were working on the line and then they would always . . . go away Carlille, go away now okay. Go away now and wait . . . And do some little dirty detail and so whenever they would come get me for the detail, you know, some little nasty detail, then I would ask them how you choose me for the detail, how you come by me. Then I say are you getting me because I'm black. Oh no, no, no. You getting me because you don't like me? No, no, no. I say you getting me because I'm the youngest man? So he couldn't give me no justification for getting me so I would always tell him so get another man see because I'm not the youngest man, I know I'm not the youngest man, I'm older than the white boy over there, I'm older than these boys over here, I'm older than these over here, now how you choose me see. So that's the way I would fight them you know. So I would fight. I did that until I came out for 25 years. And I came out in 1975.

MJ: So for the first 15 years you were on the hook out?

AR: Yeah.

MJ: And then what did you do from there?

AR: Well I was a grinder for about five years and then I was a press operator for about 4 years and I was a mill operator, cleaning iron for about a year so that's about 25 years, about 25 ½ years.

MJ: So were the jobs getting a little more easier as you went on?

AR: Yeah there was a little more justice in those jobs because like on the grinding was production. If you . . . so many pieces per hour. And if you were good and you grind you know more than you quarter per hour that would make you get through early and you then you could get through maybe a ½ hour early or sometimes an hour early and you could do more or less like if you wanted to take your time and get your quota and if you worked fast you could get it quicker and then you didn't have anything else to do when you got, you know, that was good grinding you know. And then the press operator, being a press operator you had . . . it still was production like and but it was more justice you know. All you had to do was put the iron in

that thing and hit the button you know and you got out so many pieces, but I run the automatic press, mostly like the press was like constantly running automatic and all I had to do was load it you see. And I could load it.

MJ: But what did you load it with?

AR: Well now I ran I rock iron, like little rock irons on the motor _____, they had . . . it was a machine, I was on rock iron, I ran the rock iron automatic press where you just, the little thing come around and as it come around you would put the rock on then in the little slot see and move it around and that was good I learned how to do it, you do it with your hand, you had a rubber glove because they were small.

MJ: But they're not hot or anything?

AR: No, no they was cool. So I did that and some of the iron, you know some of the jobs was a manual where you could just pick it up and put it to the wheel and grind it you know and a set up that you put it on and grind it. So that was pretty good. And the last job I had I would say it was a good job. It was a mill operator and all I had to do was put the iron, have the truck to dump the iron into a big barrel like outfit and then I latched the top on it and set the time for it to run so many times and it be turning over you know, cleaning iron and set the time on long as I thought it should take to clean the iron good like 20 minutes or 30 minutes or whatever and while it's cleaning I just wait. I had three of those and most times one was broke down. And I . . . so I would have time to just sit or get me a drink of water or go to the bathroom or something like I set it on 20 minutes and I could be gone for 20 minutes and come back and reload them you see. So that was a pretty good job. Okay now the only thing about that was I had a supervisor that didn't like to see you sit down, didn't like to see you have a little time. And my supervisor didn't like me because of who I was okay and I was working first shift and when I come in the third shift man would have a stool that he would be sitting on while he wait. So I would . . . the stool would be there so when I come in I use the stool too. So the general foreman the last day I worked, he was always messing with them, and then he would tell me to come down and so something you know and he would even put an extra box of iron over by where I'm working and tell me while I'm waiting come down and be sorting this iron or trying to find something extra for me to do. So I would always get around that. But the last day I worked he came and he saw me, I was up on about a 5 foot platform and I'm up there sitting on my stool and he came by and he said throw that stool down. And I says I didn't put this stool up here. He says well up be back in five minutes and that stool in five minutes and that stool better be gone. So he said so I didn't throw the stool down and when he came back he said I thought I told you to throw that stool down. And I said I told you I didn't put the stool up here, when I came up here it was up here. I said if you want it I said you come up here and get it. So that's what he did he came up and he got my stool and threw it down and they had a whistle for you to blow if you are one of the millwrights or the electricians or something happen you know, or the foreman okay. You blow one time for the foreman, two times for the millwright and three times for the electrician guy you know.

Whooh, whoooo, whooh that meant whoever you were blowing for would know you want them. So I put it whooooo and a long string you know and hold the whistle blowing, whooooo, whooooo so finally the foreman come running, what's the problem. I said I want the committee man. What you want the committee man, I said cuz you all took my stool. He say okay I'll get your committee man . . . go away Colille . . . go away Colille, go now, go in your room then. Okay I'm busy now okay go.

___: Can I have some of that rice?

AR: Yes go. So he got the committee man for me and that was right in the morning and the committee man said I'll go talk to him about your stool. He went and talked to him about the stool, he said he was not going to give it back to me and I asked the committee man, I said are you afraid of him? He says no. I said well no stool no work. He said okay. So we stayed out and every once in a while we were in the little office just talking about nothing. He would come back and ask the committee man when you going to send that man back to work? And I don't know what the committee man would want to say but I would always beat the committee man talking and I would say he don't have to send me back I'm talking to him. When I get through I said I'll come back you know. And so we stay out all day. And I stayed out till lunch time, went to lunch, come out and went back to the office. And so when I come home, before then about 2 or 3 years before then I fell in the plant and I hurt my back. So I learned when you get hurt like that never get well because that's all you going to do is keep them from hurting you worse you know because they would put you in a bad job but I always complained about my back then that way when they put me on the hard jobs I holler that my back hurt so I went to the . . . I had fell and I had been to the medical and I had to the doctor with my back so when I got off of work that day I went to my family doctor and told my family doctor that my back hurt and my wife was out of town visiting one of our sons and I was here by myself, all of my children was out and my youngest was away at college and so he told me to take a couple of weeks off of work. So I took a couple of weeks off and when I went back he asked me how I feel. And I told him well I fell in the plant some time ago, I said my back been hurting ever since and I said it's still hurting so he said well okay take a couple more weeks and let me give you some x-rays and see what I find. So when he gave me the x-rays he told me I have a slipped disk and collarbone or something and I told him I said I got 25 years in the plant you can kick me out early or I said I can retire. And he says well you out. I never worked since.

MJ: After that day with the stool hey?

AR: I never worked since so I came out on disability and I've been out now since '75. See almost . . . well I come out in '74 and I've been out over 25 years.

MJ: And you lived you said down the street.

AR: Right across the river over here.

MJ: You lived across the river?

AR: No, no I was here then. I was here. I was living here.

MJ: So would you drive over or would you walk over?

AR: Yeah I would drive over every day. So that's about it for my work and I know the first black everything that started out there, they was just letting us do things you know when I was coming out, the first black supervisor, the first blacks to go into the office, the first blacks . . .

__ : Do I have to eat it all now?

AR: No go away Colille. And I know when they was letting us you know do jobs and I know the first everything, the first _____, the first lectures cuz I was always watching when they come in and the first black supervisor you know they would put him on the job and they had to be you know, hard on us in order to, you know, to stay on the job. And so I would tell them you know when they come you know messing with me, I would tell them I say now look, you know what they say about us, and I would tell them, now I'm not going to be no working boy. I say I'm going to tell you what, if you mess with me I said I'm going to be just as hard on you as I am the white man. I said now get off of my back. I said I'm going to do you a fair days work, I said, but I'm not going to be your whipping boy and you ain't going to ride me. And I tell him, I said I would rather work for the white man cuz I don't want to fight you you know. . . go away Ollie where you going . . . that girl trying me.

MJ: About what year would you say . . .

AR: Get up there behind me and sit down.

MJ: About what year would you say the first black supervisor came in?

AR: It was somewhere around . . . it was in the 60's. It was in the 60's. Maybe the middle 60's. I'm not sure I just happen to know when they started but I'm not too good you know with remember times like that.

MJ: Do you remember his name?

AR: Vila Beeman I'm thinking. Wait hold, hold, hold.

MJ: No?

AR: Tom Belus.

MJ: Tom Belus?

AR: Tom Belus. Vila Beeman that was the committee man. So this was Tom Belus he was the first black supervisor and now a lot of these guys I know you know, when they come on I just happen to know that we got a black millwright or we got a black electrician or what not and I don't know all their names you know.

MJ: Would they promote them from the line or would they just come from someplace else?

AR: Yes some of them, well most of them come off the line. You see because you see like years ago we had people, African Americans, that come in there with education and abilities but they just wasn't getting any of the jobs. For instance I had a friend, dear friend of mine, his name was J.C.Davenport and we worked together. I met him the first day I started to work, he was working in the same job I started to work on. And J.C. he is in the Religion of Islam now with me okay, got to be real good friends and his name now is Jacob Mohammad. Okay he had a high school education then but I started to work with him and because when he had some ability he could do a lot of things because he had gone to school and studied electronics and he fixed TV's and radio's and things like that. He had a lot of ability. But he worked in the plant for about 25 years before they would give him a better job, and finally he didn't go back to school and get no more education, with the education he already he had could have been doing something different all the time, finally they let him, after they started letting us go in on different jobs they he applied for the electrician, so then they let him in on the electricity and he became, you know he got his journeyman whatever and he worked there as an electrician until he retired. So because they let him have that job see I came out early 25 years okay because they let him have this job making good money he stayed in for about 40 years almost.

MJ: 40 years?

AR: Yeah.

MJ: But you said for the first 25 years he was still doing the same job that he had done when you came on?

AR: The same job, yes, yes. And he's dear friend of mines you know. And that's why it was, you didn't care what you knew when you went in you know at that time, you weren't doing nothing but the hard work you see. And now when I was running the presses okay, when I was running the presses I had studied you know machinery and a lot of other things. I could do a lot of things, I could fix the presses. But they wouldn't give me the job and pay me to do it but they made me like a set up man, like didn't have to pay me for doing the work you know. Just let you change the dials and stuff like that and fix what go wrong just fix it for them for nothing to keep it going and they just let you do it with out something happening, if you can fix it just go ahead on and fix it but they not going to give you the job to do that.

MJ: And they had people that they were paying to do that?

AR: Yes. And now I'm going to show you what happened okay? I was out running this press and when it break down I would fix it okay. The foreman would aide me sometimes you know, he and I would fix something that neither one of us should have been doing, it was the millwright supposedly did that what we would be doing. So I would just fix it and keep the job going and that was good. The foreman would give me cigars and he never saw me smoking cigars because I was doing such a good job and then he asked me, he said I give you cigars all the time and he said what you do with them? I'm doing a good job you know. And I said well I smoke them when I go home, but I didn't smoke you know. But he would see me eating Baby Ruth candy bars sometimes so he started buying me a Baby Ruth candy bar and putting it in my pocket. And so I'm doing a good job fixing the press for him. So one day I messed it up, you see I was trying to fix it and in the process of trying to fix it I jammed it, so then he just looked at me and said you working out of your classification so he sent me home. Okay he sent me home, he sent me home because I was working out of my classification. Okay I let him send me home. I got the committee man, the committee man wrote out a grievance and he said well yes you working out of your classification and so that's it. They gave me two days off. I came home, I stayed two days then I went back and I asked the foreman, I asked him when I got back I asked the foreman I says I want the committee man. He says what you want with the committee man? I said I want to talk about you sending me home a couple days. He said well you working out of your classification I sent you home so what about it. I said well I want to talk about it. So he got the committee man and I told the committee man, I said I want you to get the foreman and the general foreman and tell them I want to talk with them and we want to go up in the office and talk. And he says about what? And I said about them sending me home for smashing that press. And he said well you working out of your classification and he sent you home. You smashed the press and he sent you home. I said well that's what I want to talk about. So we went up in the office, he go them up in the office, so the foreman he explained that that was not my job, I was working out of my classification, So I jammed the press or whatever. And I said I admit I was working out of my classification, I said you knew I was working out of my classification, I say so I said but I also admit that you knew I was working out of my classification, you saw me, you even aided me in doing this. I say and you job as a supervisor I would say is when you see an employee doing something that he is not suppose to do is to stop him. I said you never told me once that I was wrong. You even aided me in doing so. I said you even complimented me for doing it. I said you gave me candy bars for doing a good job for you. I said I think you are responsible for this. I said if I had been the foreman and I saw you doing something you wasn't suppose to do I said I would stop you. Something that I know you could have got hurt, I know you could have tore up something or whatever, I says I would have stopped you, I said I wouldn't have let you did it. I said I think it's your fault. And then the general foreman was shocked. He wanted to know from the foreman did he know this. He couldn't say no. And then he said well okay you can go. And then the committee man said well what you going to do about it? He said you going to pay this man for the time he lost, clear his record? What you going to do? He said yup. So that's what he had to do. So then from then on I wouldn't do nothing. I would just you know,

I wouldn't do nothing. Production fail, a lot of times I knew more about the presses than the millwrights and the electricians and sometime I know what the problem is when it break down. And they be asking me and I wouldn't tell them nothing. The press would be broke down and I would let them find the problem and the production failed. So that's you know that's somewhat the history of what I went through with that.

MJ: So I had two questions. You talked about the committee man a lot. Were there several different committee men and how were they chosen?

AR: Oh yes okay the committee men they were union representatives okay. And they . . . we voted for them, like they ran for the position of committee man every two years or something like that and then we voted for the one who we thought would make the best committee man and they represented you when you had a problem.

MJ: So who were some committee men that stand out in your mind as being particular good?

AR: That was real good?

MJ: Um hum.

AR: Well he was one of the old timers, one of the . . . his name was Thad Oven.

MJ: Oven like the stove?

AR: Oven I think, Thad Oven and he's known by most of the old timers there. He was one of the best they had and he got to be a committee man he got to be the chairmen of the committee men you know, one of the top representatives, and he was real good. He was one that helped me when I first started to work, to make it you know. When I first started to work it was a guy on my job his name was Major Michenson. Major was a . . . he worked right across from me, he was what you call a knock out, a hammer man. Knocked the bottom off the iron you know when it come out so we could hook it out and Major he saw me, the foreman, when I came in I was a pretty good man I could do work on the farm and come from the south and I was a pretty good man, I was young so I could do the work. But Major told me he says you got too much work and I hadn't been there but maybe a week. He says you got too much work just tell the foreman he said you know the foreman just coming around and giving me work, more than what I should have but I was doing it but it was hard. He said you got too much work he said tell the foreman you got too much work, he said don't tell him I told you. And so the foreman came by and I told him I says Juan I says I got too much work and then he says who told you that, that's what he say, like I'm not suppose to know you know. Well nobody. And then so he just kind of shrugged off you know and told me I had to do it. Then Major told me afterward he said tell him you want the committee man. And but you have to

have I think 90 days before the committee man can really represent you but Thad Owen was the kind of person where if you call him he would talk with you, he would take you off the line and he would talk with you and he would keep you off the line a long time and let you get a break you know, even if he couldn't write a grievance for you. So he would get me a committee man, he know the committee man ain't going to do nothing but the formal work so when I got out and I started talking with Thad and Thad was from Alabama.

MJ: A white guy?

AR: Yes, yes. A white guy. And he was from Alabama and so I told him for some reason, I don't know why I told Thad that but I told him I was from Alabama too, and so he said well you my home boy you know and so he would try to . . .he wanted to do me a favor cuz I was the home boy from Alabama. And so he just kept me, he said I can't write you no grievance he said but I'll keep you out here and let you go out cuz it's hot, I can keep you out here and we just sit out here and talk, so we just down and talk. Then we talking and he thought I had cooled off some and he asked me you able to go back and I tell him yeah and he said well you go on back there and work awhile and he said after while I'll call you again, you know things like that. And so he was, in my mind he was the best we ever had you know. And so he would go to bat for you you know and he would get a lot done.

MJ: Did he ever find out that you weren't from Alabama?

AR: I never told him. I never told him. So when we was talking I told him I was from Alabama and so he just, he was just a good committee man anyway. So he was about the best we had. We had other committee mens like the committee man at the time I retired that kept me out all day he name was Elmer Hooker. He was a good committee man too. So and after . . . another thing, the way I made it through the plant as good as I did, when I would get the committee man so much, in fact every day when ever they would mess with me I would just ask for the committee man, that's the only way I could get a break, I would ask for the committee man, get me the committee man, and they would get the committee man from me. And finally they got hip and they find out that I was losing more time you know, I was staying out more than I was in and so they said we probably get more out of him if we just leave him alone cuz every time they say something to me I say get me the committee man and when I get the committee man you know they couldn't hardly send me back cuz I'm talking and I'm telling them what happened last year. So I just stayed out you know and so finally they just let me alone and I finally did like I wanted to do. Yeah so that's another thing and the guys that called me cry baby and they would say every time you always got the committee man, I've been here so long and so long and I never got the committee man, a lot of guys would tell me that. I said well tell the man no sometime and see what he say, you see. Tell him you tired some time and see what he say you know. And you know you tell the man you know you tired you want to go on break, one day the man put me on a job outside and it was cold, below zero weather and I'm out with the rest of the guys okay and I tell they are all cold but they won't tell the foreman. I tell the foreman I said I want to go in and warm, there's no where here you

can warm and I says well they have those hot kilns in there and I said well I can go in there and stand by those kilns. He said no you can't go in there. And I said okay get me the committee man. And he said okay I'll get you the committee man and it was taking him a long time to get the committee man and while I'm waiting for the committee man I said I want to go to the medical, first aid. He said you want to go to first aid what's the matter? And I tell him my head hurt anything, but then that time I told him I said I'm cold but he let me go he give me a pass to go to medical but he called over and he talked to the nurses over there, they all knowed me because they called me a cry baby and so he called over and told them he said oh Luther, you know that was my name before I changed my name.

MJ: Luther?

AR: My name was Luther Tait. And they said oh Luther coming over there he say he cold. So by the time I walk in the door the nurse say what you want Luther? And I says I'm cold. Well there's no where over here to warm. And I said well this feels pretty good to me right here. She says you can't stand here. And I said I just, I just down over there on that bench over there, I'll just sit down. A few minutes she can call one of the big mans out of the office and he come in there and says what's the matter? And I says I'm cold. He said there's no where over here to warm, you're going to have to leave. And I says mister I says I'm cold and I says who are you? And he told me he was one of the big wheels. And I said maybe you can tell them you know to let me warm. He says no you'll have to leave. And I said well mister I says I'm cold I'm going to sit right here. And he says well if you don't leave I'm going to have to throw you out of here. And I said you know you ain't going to put your hands on me. I said you know you ain't going to. Well I'll have the guys to throw you out. I said well if they do they just going to be wrong cold as I am and so I stayed there and argued with him until I got warm and then I said well okay I go on back over here. So when I went back and when I got the committee man, I told the committee man I says he put me out here and it's cold and when I got cold he wouldn't let me warm. I said was he right or wrong. Yeah he's wrong, he was a Mexican committee man. He said he wrong, he's wrong. I said get him and tell him that I want him to apologize to me and tell me he's not going to do that any more. So he got the foreman and said told him you did the man wrong, he was you to apologize you. I'm not apologizing to no one. He wants you to apologize to him, I'm not apologizing. And so I told him I said get the general foreman and so he got the general foreman, told the general foreman. And I knowed they wasn't going to apologize to me so general foreman said well I'll talk to him. So he just smooch over to me and he said well I'll talk to him but that's part of what I come up for and I always have been a person that . . . that's why I come into the nation of Islam. You heard about Elijah Mohammad.

MJ: Um hum.

AR: Okay I heard about him and I heard his teaching in 1958 okay. And at that time he was teaching that the Caucasian was the devil and he said that God was going destroy them and he said you know he had this teaching that says if you follow him . .

___: Can I have some corn flakes?

AR: Yes go ahead. And he said if you follow him you would get freedom, justice and equality. And you will get money, good homes and you have friendship in all walks of life. Well I like that teaching you know. And because of my history, my life, the way I was brought up you know, I started following him. And I got to be one of his ministers okay so I am one of the ministers in the Religion of Islam today. So I followed Elijah Mohammad until he passed in 1975 and when he passed then his son Wallace Dean Mohammad, I got this paper here so this is him here.

MJ: Oh this is his son?

AR: Elijah Mohammad's son Wallace Dean Mohammad. So he had been to the east and studied the Religion of Islam, he had learned the Arabic language and everything, how to read the book in Arabic. The is one of our holy books and it is written in Arabic.

MJ: And you read it in Arabic?

AR: Yes and I started to follow him and so he brought the followers that followed him out of the Nation of Islam and united them with the Orthodox Religions.

MJ: This is Elijah's son?

AR: Yes. And so that's I follows him. And he come out of the racial teaching, the religion of Islam is not racial. Now Louis _____ you probably know about him. He started out following this man but he didn't last too long, he left and then he stayed out for a while and then he decided he would come back and rejuvenate the religion, the Nation of Islam so he is still teaching mostly on the line that Elijah Mohammad was teaching. He's more of a _____ teacher. But he is coming to the religion very fast and we in the religion of Islam we are required to go to Mecca once in a lifetime if we can afford to so I went to Mecca in . . .

___: 1995

AR: In '95. And my experience was the same like Malcolm X, you probably know about him. You will find it is the universal religion. People of all nationalities there you know. Let's see this is a picture that I'll show you of all different people you will see. And these are people from all over the world, every nationality.

MJ: And this is any given night?

AR: Beg your pardon?

MJ: Is this a particular event or is this what it looks like each night?

AR: No this is once a year it is what you call the time when they make the pilgrimage called the Hodge okay and there is some rituals that we perform when we go. This little house here this is what you call the Carba okay. It's big but from the picture you know, from the way it was took it appear to be small. And this is a big Harram, a big building that is built around this okay. So now all of these people is _____ this, you know, they go there and they go around this little house selling tires you know, those are some riches you know. Now I know you are not here for that but I just want you to see.

MJ: Oh no it's important, it's important.

AR: Okay now this house is the first house of worship on the plant earth that was built for man kind to worship anywhere. And they say this house was built, the Carba, it was built by the angels and during Adam time they used the same house and it was destroyed during the time of the floor and Abraham and his son Ishmael rebuilt it, angels inspired them to rebuild it and the writing is right in this book here.

MJ: And what is the name of this book?

AR: Its written in there.

MJ: What's the name of the book?

AR: The Coran.

MJ: The Coran, that's the Coran okay.

AR: So now this Mecca period, Abraham had, him and his wife was old and you probably know about it, and they couldn't have children okay and something happened that would take me too long to tell but they come in possession of a maid and Sarah, Abraham's wife told Abraham to take the maid for his wife and maybe they could produce a child and they could have a child. So he took the maid for his wife and she was younger and they had a son, Ishmael. And when his son was born then Sarah got kind of jealous of Hagar, Abraham devoted too much time to the maid and she started to come clean and God told her to take the baby and Hagar take him away. She was of African decent she was okay. But he took her out from Babylon I think it was into this area and he dropped them off. Wasn't no people there at all, they were the first two people, Hagar and Ishmael were the first two people to be in Mecca. Dropped them off with no food, no nothing, no people there, but people were passing through looking for water because it was nothing but a desert, and they were passing through looking for water

and she were there with just a little bag of dates and a jug of water and the baby. They ate up all the dates and drank up all the water then the baby crying for water and then she started running in that valley from one hill to the next hill, those mountains, _____, okay running to and fro. And while she was running to and fro looking to see if somebody was coming and praying for some water or something and after she made seven trips going from this mountain to that mountain on her way back she saw water squirting up out of the ground. And that water squirting up and she took her hands and took the sand and chopped it and made a little well for the water and so they had water to drink. And then there was some birds in there that was attracted to water, they started flying around you know, the water, water, water and it was some people coming through and they knew wherever they saw these birds there might be some water, so they started to look and then they saw Hagar and the baby and they saw the water and that's what they were looking for. They would stop wherever they found water and they had all kinds of provisions because they were childless, so they wanted some water and she told them this is my water, they said well if you give us some, let us have some you know and we will share some of our provisions with you. So they did and so from that these people could settle around there and then the started to get relatives, etc. and then they started to growing, Mecca started to growing until now it's just a kingdom you know. It's a kingdom and you'll be talking about the building, and you go to New York and to some of these places and you see these skyscrapers and see these but you haven't seen anything till you go over there and see what they got in those mountains, there is tunnels every which way right through the mountains and then they got houses sitting right up on the top of those mountains and you wonder how they get up there, you see, I got some pictures to show you how it grew from . . . just a second, I won't take long and I'll just show you and you'll see what I'm talking about.

MJ: You want me to come in there?

AR: Yeah. . . . and a lot of things to do there. This will give you another idea of what I was talking about. Each one of these will tell you at what time this was being developed. That's the same picture.

MJ: So you became a member in '75?

AR: No in '58.

MJ: In '58. Now Saginaw has a lot of Christian folks. What has been your experience with Christians in Saginaw?

AR: Okay I was brought up a Christian okay. And when I came to Saginaw I joined the church because I was brought up in the church. And I didn't like it. It really didn't do much for me.

MJ: How come?

AR: See I become involved, I'm the kind of person I become involved in whatever I become a part of and I believe right okay. I didn't like their standards of right and the way that they live because I was in there, I was with them okay. I first joined _____ on 6th Street when I came here and I was a usher and I was on the usher board with members okay. And I experienced this, I know what I'm talking about, I experienced it okay because the usher board sometimes would have a little potluck parties at each others house you know. And for instance I am a usher but my wife is not and this lady is an usher but her husband is not. And I found out that this _____ each other, you know when I go I find out that this was happening, this is wrong. Many other things I found out, I found out the preachers wasn't doing what they was suppose to do. And I found out they did a lot of good talk bu they wasn't practicing what they preach you see so right now I have relatives that I know that suppose to be good Christians but they real loose. See I had a brother that was a Decon and he died with Serosis of the liver from alcohol you see. He was drunk on Saturday night and then at church on Sunday morning, I don't believe in that you see. They, they gamble and God say don't drink, don't gamble; they drink. God said don't do it. And they call when they hit the lottery or hit the number, see I know I have a brother that write the numbers and he write in church every Sunday morning and I got my brother _____, and so he and his wife both is belonging to the church and she hooked on drugs but they in church on Sunday morning. See I don't believe in that you know. And that's not allowed, you don't do that you see. And so when they eat food that God said don't eat and things of this kind, I mean I know because I've been in it and I know I know what they do and I . . . there is so may things, and the preacher he's a good entertainer, they go to school and they study. He is a good entertainers, he can preach, they educate him and he can really make you feel good but see that's not it. I don't believe in that you see and they say good things you see, they got sense, they got smart, they not crazy they smart. See the preacher, these big ones is like good pimps, yeah, I know. And they, they have the best of everything see, The best women, you know, that's the truth now I know. The best cars, the best houses, the best of everything and they have men and women bringing them money you know. I mean he's a good pimp, they know how to do it. And so I don't believe in that, I don't believe in that. And they say what the people want them to say you see, they know you see, they say what the people want them to say, they are good entertainers. And there are some, not a lot of them, there are some for real okay. But now another thing about Christianity since you asked me, this is what I find out. I studied religion okay. And like I tell people that during my childhood days I didn't get much education. Really education wasn't a priority when I was a child. You didn't have to go to school if you didn't want to, that's why I stopped. But my parents thought I was one of the smart children in the family and they put me into the city school okay and that's why I'm a Muslim today is because my parents, and I'm the only one of my brothers and sisters that they put into the city schools. Where in the country where I was brought up the school system was only four months a year okay, but in the city it was nine months and then they had a better school system. The teachers didn't have to have a high school education to teach school in the country when I was a boy okay. So my parents put me into the city school. And when I was a little boy about 12 years old I was going six miles to school, just in the winter time carrying my books you know, on the rock road from the country you know. And living out in the

country where I lived it was a white man out there that had four children okay. And his children went to the city school, so every morning the school bus would come out and get those children, and they would pass me along the road trying to make it to school and they would be messing with me calling me nigger, nigger, nigger and all that kind of stuff, yelling at me you see. And you know laughing you see. And then that old man, their dad, he had a big farm, he had a lot of milk cows and he had a truck. A lot of times he would pass me on the road going to school or coming from school and he would stop and ask me he said hey, want a ride? And I'd tell him yes sir. He'd say you going to help me to milk this evening? I tell him no sir, then he wouldn't give me no ride. He'd cuss me and tell me to walk. You see so stuff like that made me not like him you see what I'm saying. So I'm the only one of my brothers and sisters that got this kind of experience and I'm the only one that's a Muslim. And the way that they treated me and from what happened to me when I came here you see, then when I heard Elijah Mohammad I liked that. And what he was teaching that's what brought me in you know. And I got in, only I came in for the racial part because I liked that. When they said God going to destroy them, I said oh boy I like that you know and so I joined it. But then after I got in you know I started studying it and I got hooked on the religion okay. Then I find out by studying that when our people were brought here a lot of them were Muslim's you see, a lot of them were Muslim's and they had this _____ that they called Timbuktu, you probably heard about it, okay it was our ancestors that was the scholars and they, that was the faculty staff and people from all over the world went there to that institution and they were taught by our ancestors okay. And so that tells me that they were not crazy you see. And then when they got ready over a period of time for our people to become Christians and they started letting us, after we were slaves, after they robbed us from the knowledge ourselves, our religion, took our names, our languages, our history, our culture, they took all that away from us. And then there was a time when they didn't allow us to read, write or pray any of these things if they caught us with a pencil some time they would punish us you know, to the point of cutting your fingers off you know. And even would take us and punish us by nailing our ears to, nailing us to a barn by putting nails through our ears and just nail us down yo know. For things, for disobeying them okay. About us trying to . . . and if you was you know smart enough to know how to read or right they call you smarty and they really persecuted you, you know. So they took all that away from us. Then when they got ready they let us practice the religion and we took it then just for a social place to go and have a good time you know, for freedom but our preachers couldn't read or right. They had the book upside down. But the master would take the smart one that could remember things and tell him what to tell his congregation and that was be good to your master you know. And don't do this and don't do that and work hard and when you die you get close to heaven you see, and things like that okay. And so and when Richard Allen, he was our first black preacher, when he started the preaching, he was fortunate and he opened up the first church and started preaching so he was showing how we were, we had smart people you know. He was able to preach and he even had at that time white members in his church, he was that kind of a preacher you know what I mean. But they, over a period of time, they tampered with the book, they tampered with the bible. The bible have actually been tampered with and we can read the history and it will tell you. They translated and revised the book. I believe with the translation because if you couldn't read the language well they had to translate it. You don't mess with God's word. See

when you mess with what God says then you corrupts it, you takes the purity away from it. Holy is something that has not been mixed, diluted or tampered with in any form. Once you tamper with it it's not holy any more. It's not true anymore, so they tampered with the book. And we don't know, then they made Paul, he is great figure in the religion and I hope I'm not hurting you by saying this but Paul never saw Jesus and God didn't sent him, he wasn't a profit but he was a educated man and he was a wise man and the preachers today, those letters that Paul wrote when he was incarcerated they act like it was God. The bible said, and then they say he was inspired by God oh yeah alright but then they call the bible the Word of God. Call them letters that Paul wrote the Word of God, no, no, no, it don't work that way. Those was the letters that Paul wrote to those different people and he changed a whole lot of things that God said. Yeah because he was educated. And is a lot of good in it. But don't tamper with the book. Now this is a book that can no be tampered with, it can not be tampered with. . .put that . . . stop Ali . . . cuz God put this book in the heart of his profit and the people. There are hundreds of thousands of people that know this book from cover to cover, every alphabet in it. Got to put it in their hearts. There are people here in our community that every year when the _____ come we have a brother that recites this whole book and he give it to anybody that want to check him and hold it and if he happen to make a mistake they will call his hand, but he know this book from cover to cover.

MJ: And he's here in Saginaw?

AR: Right here in Saginaw. And we have people, we have hundreds of thousands, that's the way God did this book to preserve it you know. And if they take this book now and take them all and burn them up and let people of the religion can rewrite it overnight because God had put it on their heart and their mind, it's in their head, you can't do that with the bible, you got too many, got too many different bibles that say different things you see. And they tell you when King James had, the book that they call the King James Version, when he had that book translated, he selected 54 or 56 men to do it and revise and he give them his orders and they didn't do it the way he wanted it done and he had them all persecuted, he had them all killed okay. And then he selected others to do it and when they did it the way he wanted it done and approved it, then they called it the King James Version of the Bible. And so King James was just a man, but they call that a holy book. A book that they have tampered with they call it holy, see and it's not holy. See they added in and took out of it what they want to and now people are going to school and they try to justify everything that's in here and try to tell people and try to scare people and ask you do you believe in the bible? And if you don't say yes then they get scared of you. They start telling you oh something is going to happen to you, you don't believe in the bible you know but we believe in the truth of the bible, we believe in all of the scriptures that God sent to all of the people that he sent them to but we believe also that the bible have been tampered with.

___: Daddy, can I have that little book like that, that little green book?

AR: Look don't you all bother me now I'm talking okay, go away.

MJ: We're going to be done in just a little bit.

AR: Okay so I didn't let you ask me anything yet.

MJ: Well you know what I would like you do, I know you said you didn't want to do this a whole lot of time but what I would like to do is come back one more time, maybe next week if possible.

AR: Okay and then I'm going to let you ask me what you want to ask me and then I won't ramble so much.

MJ: No you don't even need to apologize especially I'm very honored to be able to hear more information about your work at Malleable that is very important and your spirituality is very important as well particularly because you talk about the ways that they connect you know, you can't separate out your experiences and your responses at work from your spirituality, it's not . . . so no don't even apologize for anything. But I would like to come back and ask a few questions maybe just one more time and I know your time is precious but if we could do that, could we come back next Thursday? No, could we come Wednesday, let me look at this.

[END OF TAPE ONE]

[BEGIN TAPE TWO]

9-23-99

MJ: The last time we talked . . . It is September 23rd and would you state your name?

AR: Abdul Raheem Rashada.

MJ: Last time when we talked we talked a lot about your experiences working at the plant and we didn't talk a whole lot about when you moved to Saginaw and where you moved to when you came here. Did you move to the southeast side?

AR: No when I first came to Saginaw I had a brother living on 6th Street, it was 1208 North 6th Street.

___: Daddy . . .

AR: Now look you go away okay I'll be through after while and then I'll be with you okay.

—: Okay.

MJ: 1208 North 6th?

AR: Yeah.

MJ: And this was 40?

AR: 49.

MJ: And how long did you live there?

AR: I lived there with my brother about a month and I got a job at the Malleable and I worked about two weeks, it was two weeks before you would get a check I think. And then I sent and got my wife and we lived there with my brother about two weeks while I was trying to find somewhere. So I found a room at 630 North 8th Street with Mr. and Mrs. Richard Pitts.

MJ: So they had a large house?

AR: Yes they had a large house about like this I would say and they had an apartment up stairs and they had three or four rooms down and I moved into a room there and I was in the room for maybe a couple of weeks and the people moved out from the upstairs and then I moved in the upstairs apartment.

MJ: Did you and your wife rent the room?

AR: Yes.

MJ: And then you both rented the apartment up there?

AR: Yes, yes.

MJ: How long were you in that apartment?

AR: About three years.

MJ: About three years? Now when you first came to Saginaw and you were living on 6th, what was 6th Street like in 1949?

AR: Okay it was a lot of beer taverns and little gambling joints you know all around. And it was just a place to hang out and for guys that liked to drink and have fun you know there was a lot of it done around there.

MJ: And were there restaurants?

AR: A few little eatery's, yes there was a few restaurants and it was just beer taverns everywhere.

MJ: So the bulk of the buildings there, the businesses were beer taverns?

AR: Beer taverns yes, mostly. And then they had little places where they went and gambled you know, gambling joints I call them.

MJ: So then you lived on 8th Street for three years?

AR: For about three years then I moved to . . . they had some out here in the place they called the Daniel Heights now. Over in the area where the First Ward Community Center is over in that area it was some wooden army type barracks like you know apartments, but they were kind of like army camps you know and I moved in an apartment out there.

MJ: So that would have been in about '52, '53?

AR: Somewhere in there.

MJ: And how long did you live there?

AR: I lived there for about three or four years.

MJ: Now do you have kids at this point?

AR: Yes I had four children. I had one child when my wife came here. I had one son who was six months old when my wife came here, and in '50 I had a son was born in '50 and I had a daughter born in '51 and the last one was born in '52.

MJ: So all of them had been born before you moved to what they call Daniel Heights?

AR: No one of them was born over there.

MJ: So maybe that last one?

AR: Yes the last one was born in '52. She was born over there.

MJ: So was the apartment a good sized apartment over there?

AR: I had just a two bedroom apartment.

MJ: Two bedroom okay. And so then you are driving over here to work at that point?

AR: Yes.

MJ: So what was that community like?

AR: It was a family place like you know, it was nice you know, just families like myself lived in those apartments you know and it was nice, a nice little community.

MJ: Were a lot of the adults working in the plants?

AR: Yes mostly. Some was working in what you call the Gray Iron over there and some of them was working over here at Malleable where I worked.

MJ: And so were there some people that you worked with during your shift that lived nearby?

AR: Yes, yes. It was some and we kind of teamed up you know and commuted to work you know, like one that had cars would drive one week and you know and like three or four of us would be riding in a car together coming in. We take turns driving and it was, well they live around in that area the guys that we worked together and we commuted.

MJ: And what shift were you on?

AR: Mostly the second shift.

MJ: So you lived over there for three or four years?

AR: Yes and I'm not really sure what year it was but when I moved from over there I moved over here on the south side in the 3400 block down near the naval base.

MJ: On what street?

AR: The same street.

MJ: So near the naval base. Now was the naval base in operation then?

AR: Yes it was.

MJ: Now where there people living at the naval base?

AR: No they just had, I guess it was kind of a reserve base like, the sailors that was serving in the military but they was only reserve and I'm thinking that's how they would meet up there and drill and I guess studying and do things of that kind.

MJ: So it's probably around 1956, 55 that you moved over here?

AR: Maybe '55, close to '55.

MJ: So what was the neighborhood like then when you moved here?

AR: When I moved over here?

MJ: Um hum.

AR: Okay, it was an integrated neighborhood you know and I guess about I would say 50/50 you know during that time.

MJ: 50/50 black 50/50 white?

AR: Yes cuz they was all around and so and it was you know they had houses all around and now this street at that time this street was just a little rock street, it was no pavement.

MJ: Oh okay. So like gravel?

AR: A little rough gravel street.

MJ: All along?

AR: All the way through from this whole street was gravel, all gravel this whole street.

MJ: But there were houses all along?

AR: Houses yeah on both sides all along. Like when I moved here it was three or four houses, it was about three other houses right in this area where these lots are here.

MJ: Right across the street?

AR: Yeah it was three houses, it was three houses in between these two houses here there was three more houses over there and it was a little house right next to me here, right next to where I am and it was a big house right where the parking lot is, it was a big house there and houses was just on both sides all the way down.

MJ: So a lot of the people in the neighborhood at that point seemed to work at the plant?

AR: Yes most of them.

MJ: So black and white?

AR: Um hum.

MJ: Where there any Hispanic people that lived in this area do you remember?

AR: It was a few of them spotted around.

MJ: So this is 1955 or so, it's pretty mixed. What seemed to be the relations like between the people that lived here?

AR: I didn't see any problem too much you know, I didn't see any problem too much because I was working all the time and I didn't do a lot of socializing or anything because I was working all the time and my wife didn't work so she you know knew more of the people and she did more of whatever had to be done like going to the schools and the PTA's and whatever you know and she knew most of the people, I didn't know too many people cuz sometimes I was working two jobs trying to make it you know. All the over time I could get so I wasn't in the street too much.

MJ: Now what were the surrounding businesses like when you got here?

AR: Okay it was a store right here where that red house right on the other side of this building. It was a store, just a little community store you know.

MJ: Do you remember the name of it?

AR: No I don't know the name of it but it was a little store there. And on the, right over on . . . that must be Yoman, this is Nimmons, the next street up I think is Yoman and Russell, it was a store right down there so there was two stores right in this area.

MJ: So how did those two stores differ from each other?

AR: Well they had . . . they both was just little community stores they was selling practically the same things.

MJ: Like what kinds of things?

AR: Like groceries and little items that people use in their homes you know. And it was a nice little place where you could go and get things and they had at that time, they had like you could . . . the would sell the grocery like on credit you know. You could go and get what you wanted and then pay on Friday or Saturday you know. Anytime you go in and put in a little application for credit I mean then if you wanted something you could just go in and get what you wanted and then on Saturday you pay, so it was kind of nice you know. The stuff was higher you know but it was a nice little thing for people you know that didn't have money.

MJ: And so there wouldn't be any interest or anything?

AR: No you just pay whatever.

MJ: Pay whatever you spent?

AR: Yes, yes.

MJ: Now which store would you go to? Did you have a preference between the two?

AR: Well since I was . . . when I was living down the street there then, I'm trying to think of this guys name, I can't think of his name now but I did know, Benny, I think that was Benny's grocery okay. And so he was closer to me and so I had a little credit account with him and I would patronize him mostly.

MJ: Now was Benny black or white?

AR: He was white.

MJ: And you always felt treated fairly?

AR: Yes, yes.

MJ: Were either of them black owners?

AR: No they both white.

MJ: Do you know was Benny, did he live in the neighborhood?

AR: Yes, I know Benny had a guy that worked for him in his store that lived right across from his store, he was white, and he I'm thinking, I'm not really sure, but I'm thinking Benny home there was a house right across where the neighborhood house sitting, there was a little house sitting, he owned that house and he used to live in it anyway, Benny did. And I'm not sure but he used to live in that house Benny did. But right across my fence there was a house sitting right there.

MJ: So you see to eat pretty healthy.

___: I can get it.

AR: Hu?

___: I can get the _____.

AR: You also make the _____ okay. Go, go now. You stop acting.

MJ: I said you seem to eat pretty healthy?

AR: Eat pretty healthy?

MJ: Um hum.

AR: Yes, yes.

MJ: That's good so you try not to use white sugar?

AR: They use a little bit but I don't use too much sugar and when I do I use brown sugar mostly.

MJ: Or like maple syrup?

AR: And I use maple syrup?

MJ: So why is that?

AR: Maple syrup is more of a natural sweetener and I learned that and so I eat what I think is best for me.

MJ: That's good. I've been a vegetarian for a long time. Fifteen years or something and so I try to stay away from the sugar myself.

AR: Okay. I had a book that I was reading about the sugar you know and they got that packing . . .

MJ: Was it Sugar Blues?

AR: I have the Sugar Blues yeah. I have that one and then I have another one about sugar, about the Atkins Health Diet book. It tell you about . .

__ : How high should I put it on?

AR: Put it on about 25 second.

__ : Hu?

AR: 25 okay.

MJ: Okay so you said Benny lived across the street from the . . . well the Neighborhood House wasn't there then right?

AR: No.

MJ: Okay but just straight through your kitchen?

AR: Yeah.

MJ: Okay so there were those two stores. What other kind of businesses were in this area? Either from here this area up to Washington?

AR: It wasn't any more stores I can remember, only was right here where this party store was there was a gas station there.

___: This hot enough?

AR: Just a little bit now.

MJ: Now I seem to remember right over here at the foot of the bridge down this way was that a gas station?

___: Daddy can I _____?

AR: Go away yes.

MJ: Was it a gas station or an auto? That building that is right at the river, kind of right at the river? Remember where the old bridge used to be? So here's the bridge it used to be down right there, what was that?

AR: It was a . . . well I knew it's a car wash now and I just remember I don't know just what that was really but I know that car wash been there for a long time and I don't hardly know.

MJ: Yeah I don't remember, we used to drive by it all the time and I can't remember if it was a gas station or just trying to figure out when that might have come. If that was here when you got here?

AR: Yes it was there. But I didn't do too much business in that area. I know it was there, I don't know what that was.

MJ: So those are the couple of stores here and then you said the party store it was a gas station?

AR: Um hum.

MJ: What else was happening on Washington at that time?

AR: Okay then you know about the _____ school, it was like on Washington and that's about it and Dr. Goldberg's office was in the area and before he built that place over here where they have now, they have a little cosmetic place there where Goldberg used to be but his office was on the south side right across Hess on Washington, right across on Washington before he moved up here but I just, that's all that I can remember. There was a lot of other little, right there where the church is in there now used to be a gas station but it was a store there where they sold beer, wine and little groceries and things and they cashed checks, it was right there on the corner where a church is in there now.

MJ: Right there on Washington?

AR: Yes.

MJ: Oh Okay right there, right where the church is?

AR: Yeah right there.

MJ: Now you said when you first moved here to Saginaw on 6th Street there were a lot of beer taverns and gambling joints. Did you find that over in this area or was that something that was different about this area?

AR: They had a couple beer taverns but it was different over here. It was different. Now downtown right, they had a nice little shopping area right down here, down here on the south side, you didn't have to go, you couldn't get almost anything you wanted back here.

—: Daddy I found this on the floor. I'm done.

AR: Okay. You could get almost anything you wanted you know down here, they had nice little shopping.

MJ: So what all was down there then?

AR: They had shoes stores, clothing stores, and they had all kind of little stores, drug stores and all kind of little stores downtown, it was a nice little shopping area.

MJ: Just like right over here?

AR: Yes right across Hess on Washington. It was nice grocery store and it was a nice little grocery store, Walgreens I believe it was, Walgreens Grocery. You know they had nice groceries in there, you could get most anything you wanted right here on the south side.

MJ: So you didn't have to go?

AR: You didn't just have to maybe, people shopping for bargains probably would go where they could get things cheaper but you could get almost anything you wanted right on the south side?

MJ: So when did that start to change?

AR: Well as time passed and they started building up and they had this Urban Renewal I called it you know and they was you know like most of the houses they tore down, they bought the peoples houses whatever and tore down their houses and started building up and that was probably in the 60's, is when they started making a lot of changes. Now for instance in '58 I

moved here in this house in '58 and just before I moved here or right during that time is when they paved the street.

MJ: Oh okay.

AR: And right during that time they paved the street and there was a lot of changes you know, they just started making changes from then and in the 60's you know things just started changing.

MJ: Was this the only unpaved street in the neighborhood?

AR: Yes because the streets back in that area was paved mostly and so then they didn't pave this all at once, they paved down to Bradley first and they stopped and then they . . . in about three or four years you know they started to pave it on down.

MJ: Oh so they took a long time off?

AR: Yes yes.

MJ: Okay you said you call it Urban Renewal?

AR: Yes it was right during that time and I had some real _____ because I was trying to encourage the people to build up their houses you know and to kind of just . . . to keep the people from just taking their houses you know. I had a one man program going around you know, talking with people and trying to get them to do something about the neighborhood to keep the people from just taking their property. Because I went and sit in on when they was just kicking people out I call it you know, and I went in and sit in on their court when a lot of people was protesting the people taking their property and I went and sit in on the court and I used to listen to the court you know, just listen and see what they were doing and I would just sit there. And every day I'd just go and I'd just sit in the court and listen, see what they were saying and they would take people's houses you know, like give them what they want to give them for the house. And so the people felt their houses was worth more than they was giving them. And then this is the way the judge was handling these cases. I was sitting and I would listen and he would ask, they always had a lawyer you know. Like the City or whoever they had a lawyer, and he says do you think we give him enough for his house? And they said yes I do. And now he'd ask the person, he would ask the person that bought the house, do you think you gave him enough for his house? He said yes I do. Then he'd ask the lawyer, do you think he gave him enough for his house and he said yes I do. Then he would say to the person that owned the house, well they think they gave you enough for your house. So what you want them to do? Give you more than what they think your house is worth? Something like that. And they just turned the cases out you know like that. And they weren't doing anything about it so I was trying to encourage the people to fix up their houses and

telling them that if they beautify and fix up their houses, then if the people wanted them they would have a chance at getting more out of the houses you know, and stuff like that. So I was watching that, I know it was in the 60's, and I had that _____ that I was circulating.

MJ: I'd like to see that.

AR: I wished I had it so I could let you see what it was.

MJ: If you find it give me a call, I would like to see it. I think it would be very important.

AR: I think it would too.

MJ: So why would they tell people that they wanted to buy their houses?

AR: They thought they was good enough see and they was just like they did . . . see there was a . . . they did a lot of changing and like they build these little new houses down in here, they just took their houses and tore these people's houses down and they just took a lot of people's houses and wasn't really giving the people what their houses was worth.

MJ: But they couldn't force people to sell their houses?

AR: Somehow they was in some of the areas they was. Like across on the north side where they run that express through there, well they forced those people to, you know, because they was building that expressway so they was taking people's houses because they just wasn't giving them, just wasn't paying them for their houses. I have something here. (Cannot understand response)

MJ: Oh it is.

AR: Yes.

MJ: Okay can I make a copy of this?

AR: You can have that. (Cannot understand) I was looking, I thought I would have that think that I was just talking about. And this is something else you can just read it anyway, that was the first newsletter, little newsletter that I put out and (cannot understand) and then after we bought a place over there and after I worked and got the place and all up to use and everything then I put out that newsletter.

MJ: Can I make a copy of this?

AR: You can keep that, I have some more.

MJ: Okay thank you. So they are in the 60's then making it really uncomfortable? Like for instance were you ever approached to sell your house?

AR: Well not by the city but by the Neighborhood House here. See when they got ready to build this place here they just had a little place over there. Do you know what it was like before they built this?

MJ: Um um.

AR: Okay they just had a little small place back near Russell okay because there was a house in between here when I moved here, there was a house in between here right over there in front and they tore it down and then the neighborhood house had bought it and they used it for a playground. So when they got ready to build this then Mr. Culpepper, you know he was over there, he came over and talked to me about them buying this because he told them that he would talk with me about him buying this, so I told him I said well, I don't want to sell, I said, so I . . . and I told him, I just give it to him like this, I said my house is paid for and I'm comfortable here. And I said so we don't want to talk about me selling I say if you all are willing to relocate me with something like you know that will accommodate me like what I have, said you can see what I got, and just relocate me somewhere else where I'm comfortable and I'm satisfied with and I'll take that and you take this you know. No they just wanted to give me four or five thousand dollars to take my place you know.

MJ: Four or Five thousand dollars?

AR: Yes, you know.

MJ: What year was this?

AR: I'm not sure exactly what year they built this but that's what it was. But anyway . . .

MJ: Are we talking the 70's or 80's?

AR: It was in the 70's.

MJ: So they weren't offering you what your house was worth?

AR: Well he said he didn't really come up with a price you know, but they wanted me to sell. And so I told them we don't want to talk about a price, just relocate me.

MJ: In something comparable.

AR: Just find me another place you know that will accommodate me with what I have here and then I'll take that and you take this. And so then they said well you know and then he went back and made his report you know and they said that to find me a place somewhere else would cost them too much you know so that means that they didn't want to pay you see, and so well they decided that they would bother me so they bought what they could buy and so that's why they built around me like they did ya see, they built around me. So like I had my place fenced in all of it, this is my fence it's not theirs, they use my fence but they just built around me ya see rather than, but they wanted to get it, see I was the key person in this area, they wondered if they could buy from me they thought they probably could get the whole block and get these other houses, but after I didn't, you know I just told them to relocate me you see, I said I'm not going in debt for another house, I have my house paid for and I'm comfortable here. I don't, you know, intend to go in debt for another house and if you want this just relocate me. Just find me something else and that would satisfy me like what I have so they said well another house in another area like this would cost them too much so they wouldn't.

MJ: Now how many bedrooms does this have?

AR: I got three bedrooms. See what happened, when I bought this place it was two apartment place okay.

MJ: Oh it was?

AR: Because I had the stairway going upstairs, but when I bought it I made it into a family house okay so I just made all of the rooms up into bedrooms so I have three bedrooms up there, a hall and another little attic like place.

MJ: So do you think when this was built it was built to be two?

AR: Two?

MJ: Two apartments?

AR: Yes.

MJ: It was originally built that way?

AR: Yeah it was built that way. See this house was, this particular house I gathered information about this area, you see the guy that built this house he owned most of the property in this area so this house was built differently, if you notice it is different, it's different from the rest of the houses here and so he built this house for his self and he had all them so he built it different from the houses, so this house had . . . what happened to this house it had big colonial rocks in front, that porch was different, but a guy ran into my house and tore down the blocks and the porch had decorative woodwork you know, it was woodwork out there so he tore down the blocks, one of the corner blocks and they couldn't find the same kind of blocks to re-do it, you know, so I had to change, I had the front changed and fixed like it is, but it was different, had a different kind of front on it so it was just different from all the houses in here.

MJ: What was the guys name that you bought the house from?

AR: Now well I bought this house from Mrs. Ducamp but she got it from the person . . .

MJ: But he owned a lot of the property around here along the road here or in the neighborhood?

AR: Yes in this area he owned most of the property in this area and he had this house built for himself and it had a house built right next to this one right across the fence for his daughter, so some person told me that knew about it.

MJ: So you have an idea about what year this house was built?

AR: Probably before I was born.

MJ: Yeah?

AR: I'm not sure.

MJ: So I want to come back to the people who were moved out essentially. Do you know who would they be approached by and how would that happen?

AR: By the people that owned the property?

MJ: Like say I owned the house across the street and the city had identified that they wanted that property, they wanted that house to be able to then build something. Who would approach me?

AR: Well I'm not sure see the city had people employed to do that see and I'm not sure just who these people were.

MJ: But they were city employees?

AR: Yes, yes they were. Because like I say I know, I used to sit in on court, just sit in you know, and it would be the city representative was accompanied by a lawyer you know, but the person that you know was doing the dealings for the houses I'm not sure just who this person was but it was somebody working for the city.

MJ: And if I didn't want to sell they would put pressure on me to go?

AR: Yes they would put pressure on you because I had a friend that they wanted his house and he didn't want to see it, he just wouldn't sell it, he had did a lot of work to his house and he wouldn't sell it and so they wanted the house.

MJ: Even after he had done the work on it?

AR: Yes because they wanted that house because they was going to run the express down through where his house was you know. And so he sit there until . . .he got him a lawyer you know, and he just sit there until the last minute you know, and they was telling him that you know, that they was just going to take his house, you know, and they was just going to push it down if he didn't get out of it. But he got him a lawyer and he just sit there. And so he got his price for it, he sit there and he fought him. Finally they paid him and took it but then it just, it was determined, they just had to have the property you see and so they just going to run this highway through here and your house is in the path and we want it and then they would have somebody to come and you know appraise it you know, and say well it worth x dollars you know and most people was just taking what they say it's worth and letting it go, and few of them would fight it out. Some would take what they gave them, they wanted more and the people wouldn't give them no more so they would take what the people gave them but they would take it to court you see to try to see if they could get more for their house and then that's the way the judge was turning most of them off you know, just telling them well they think they gave you enough for your house. And they would say something like, what do you want them to do, give you more than what you think your house is worth? That's not fair to them is what he would say.

MJ: And what was your friends name that held out?

AR: His name was Earl Johnson, Earl Johnson. He held out till the end. Earl is . . .he live over . . . in fact you might just talk with Earl.

MJ: I would like to talk with him.

AR: His name I probably can find it in the telephone book. His name is Earl Johnson. I'm going to see if I can find it. You should talk with Earl because Earl was a friend of mine and he fought it out with them, he can tell you somethings.

MJ: Ya right. Okay was there anybody around here on the south side that fought it out with them?

AR: I don't know of anybody. Earl is the only person that I really know that really had it out with them and got his price out of his house, that he went to the limit with them you know, so he could tell you more about that then I could because he was one that I know fought it out.

MJ: So over there they could tell people we want you to move, we want your house because we want the expressway through here. What were they telling people over here? What excuse?

AR: They just come by because they see the houses all on both sides of the street and down in this area, down in the area now where I used to live, there's no houses in there at all now, see they got houses on this side but on that side of the street you have the Neighborhood House, down below that street there is no houses in that area. And so this open place all the way over here where there's no houses, there was houses all around.

MJ: So these houses they would tell people we are going to do something, we need to buy your house, we're going to build something better up there but they never built anything back up there?

AR: Never, never. They just built some of these little houses like they got here, little houses that they build down in here they built some and so it went back to the people but they just . . . they just took the people's houses and gave them what they want to give them for them. . . . Go away now . . .

__: Dad.

AR: Go away now.

__: Can I make some popcorn?

AR: Yes.

MJ: But then I just want to be real clear. But then they never built anything back up in those places?

AR: No, no, no. No that's right. So it was houses all along there on so they just took the people's houses.

__: Daddy, don't want to cut myself

AR: Okay.

MJ: So then at this point now we are in the 60's, they are buying up peoples houses, is it still racially mixed in the neighborhood or has it started to shift some?

AR: It had shift you know.

__: Dad what do I put it on?

AR: 235. It would shift because when I bought over here, when I bought here where I am now, during that time when I moved over here, across Gallagher in that area over there it was only two African American families living in that area.

MJ: And that's '58 right?

AR: Yes, yes. There was only two and that was . . it was a lady by the name of, I just called her Mrs. Ranklin and one other guy Ruben Boyt, they were the only two African Americans lived across Gallagher Street on the other side over there and during that time like that area, they just had their open house thing for the city where you could move around you know different places, you couldn't move where you wanted to move when I moved over here see. When I moved over here they had _____ you know African American's just weren't allowed to live see, across the river on the west side, you know we couldn't live over there. It was only one family that I know, these people were some old timers that lived in that area but we wasn't allowed to live in that area.

MJ: But this was okay, it was okay to live over here?

AR: Yes and when we started to moving in there it mostly whites in these houses and when we started to move over here then they started to move out.

MJ: So how long after they started moving out did the city start coming in and doing Urban Renewal? Or was it around the same time?

AR: I can't hardly say I just know it happened.

MJ: Were they buying up white peoples houses?

AR: I don't know, they just went where ever you know.

MJ: But when you would go to court?

AR: Most were African Americans, it was African Americans mostly that was out.

MJ: Did you ever see an instance where an African American went to court got satisfaction?

AR: No.

MJ: And how often did you say you went to court?

AR: Oh I would go once or twice a week.

MJ: For about how long?

AR: For maybe two or three months you know. I would just go over there and just sit, I would just go over and sit and hear different cases you know, just see. They wouldn't say anything, you could go and just sit, go on and just sit back and see what was going on. Like all of the cases weren't about the houses you know, they was about different things, but you could just sit you know, and I just happened to be in and see what different cases were about and see what was going on. See because I like to talk about things and so I like to know.

MJ: So you said at this point then you go on the one man crusade to get people to start improving their houses so that they won't get moved out because you see what that master plan is right?

AR: Um hum, um hum.

MJ: What was your campaign? How did you . . .

[END SIDE ONE]

[BEGIN SIDE TWO]

AR: . . . I had this paper go back a little, I had this paper that I had written you know and I would just circulating (sic) my little paper you know and talking to the people you know, saying whatever, supporting what I had _____ you know, telling them that it's their

neighborhood and beautify their homes and do this and do that. . . Carlile just stop . . . Okay you just get yours and stay in there.

MJ: And so when you would talk with them and tell them to fix it up, would you also talk to them about the fact that the city was making an effort to move people out?

AR: Yes.

MJ: Okay so you wouldn't just say beautify your home, you would say do it because . . .

AR: Yeah because they are taking the people's homes, yeah I let them know that they are taking them people homes you know. . . . Calille why don't you take your popcorn and go in there and eat it okay. . .

___: I don't want to . . .

AR: Go ahead, go ahead.

MJ: So you let them know that they need to do this because they are taking peoples homes?

AR: Yes.

MJ: So did you feel that if people did fix up their homes that that would prevent people from coming in and buying it?

AR: No I would tell them that they could get a better price for it anyway, they could demand a better price for it you know if they fix it up you know, and if it worth more you can ask more for it you know, so that was part of it.

MJ: Did you ever advise people not to sell at all?

AR: No, no I didn't. I didn't advise them not to.

MJ: So where did most people move to when they left the home that they had sold?

AR: Where ever they could find someplace to move, I think like during that time they was . . . they had kinda broadened the territory where we could live and then we was moving out like in Bridgeport and out on Outer Drive and places you know, down on Janes Street you know, and places where they was allowing us to move into. See that was a time, like I remember when didn't any people, African Americans live on or across Janes Street, do you know about that area over there?

MJ: Um hum.

AR: Okay it was a dive but the manager of the projects where I moved into when I moved off of 6th Street, his name was Wilson, Mr. Wilson I called him, he was probably the first African American to live on Janes Street. Then a little later on Dr. Claytor, know him, you know, he got killed him and his wife got killed, he built a nice house down on Janes Street and then I had an insurance person, his name was Brown, Mr. Brown, I just called him Mr. Brown, he used to sell insurance and he bought a nice little house down, you know we was moving out then and I remember when these people was buying these houses you know, when they started getting a little more territory you know. So they had us like you don't cross this line you know, then they moved the line then we started moving out a little farther. It's like when I bought this house this was the best that I could do at the time then I just got stuck when I bought this house and I just stayed here see and now so I'm satisfied, all the people know me in this area and I don't bother no body and I've just been here in this area and I try to be, well I don't beautify my lawn or do nothing like I used to because I don't feel like it, but I used to keep it real nice down here, trying to be an example in the community of what people can do if we want to you see.

MJ: But you still keep it up, it's not messy and grown up or anything.

AR: Yeah but then I haven't made any spare to do anything like this year cuz my wife passed and I'm just here and hopefully I'll be getting married again and I'll start doing something.

MJ: So when people started selling their houses and moving out then that's when you say Washington Street up here started to change and some of the businesses, is it because they didn't have the same customer base?

AR: Um hum.

MJ: Um hum.

AR: I would say so.

MJ: Now when did the south side get the reputation and how did it get it, of being one of the rougher sides, of being the rougher part of Saginaw?

AR: I guess like the people, when the people started to moving out you know, people started to moving out when they started letting us move out into different areas, then the people who care and wanted a different neighborhood you know, what they call a better place, then they would move out and then other people would move in you know. And so that's what

happened, you know when the people that care you know leave the area, then you leave the people there that don't care then the area just go down and you have everything, you see, and it's just like myself, you see, I don't bother the people, I know what they doing, I don't bother them, they don't bother me because you know I just attend to my business and they don't bother me, they know I'm in here, they don't bother me and I don't bother them you know. I don't have to work with them so I just don't bother them. You see but I know there is drugs all up and down here and I know what they doing but they respect me you know. (cannot hear response). So it's just the people that kill that move out and then the people that don't kill that's . . . they are around here.

MJ: So when the people moved out initially in the 60's did it leave a lot . . . were a lot of the houses then rented? See because a lot of the people who moved out had owned their homes, right? About, maybe just a guess, how many people who stayed here still owned their homes and how many do you think still rented, you know like just a percentage?

AR: See some of the houses you know, like in the area, like some of the while people moved out and rented their house and still rent the house. See a lot of the houses that belong to people around here, the people that living in them don't own them, see they rent them from somebody. Then some people buy them a house somewhere else and rent the one they were staying in. Sometimes they rent it. So a lot of these houses that you see people in now, the people don't own them. That was part of what I was working on it the people rented these houses and won't fix them out, they living somewhere else, they renting them and letting them go down see, and I was telling the people, we would demand that the people that owned these houses fix them up or we don't pay them the rent. See that was part of my campaign. We don't pay you no rent if you don't fix the house up you know and care about the area. The rent these old run down houses in our community and they live in some other place and they won't fix the houses up you see. So that's part of the problem here now. For instance just like the house right over here, that guy live some other place you see and then he have people come in and stay there a little while then they move in and somebody else move in here and then the other house down there, most of the houses down here, you know, somebody else own them, the people don't own them that live in there.

MJ: So did you ever get anybody to withhold their rent until they got their house fixed up?

AR: No, no, no. It was just something that I was trying to do, I didn't have too much luck you know, but I passed the word, I thought I would still try to (cannot understand)

MJ: So you said this was a one man campaign. Who were . . . did you have friends in Saginaw who were of like political mind? That anybody that you could talk to about these kinds of things?

AR: I was the only person . . . see I was, during that time in the Religion of Islam, well for instance just like now, I'm the only Muslim living on this side of town you know so I didn't have nobody to work with me. It was just other people that had the same mind that I had but they didn't live in this area. I'm the only Muslim that live on this side of town.

MJ: But the kinds of things that you were saying, you know we need to either beautify our homes so that we can get a better price or withhold rent until the land owner fixes up the house. Those . . . it seems like you would be able to find some allies even across religious traditions, would you think?

AR: Sure.

MJ: But now huh?

AR: No. A lot of people just wouldn't because of you know at that time that was one time . . . at that time people thought people like myself were somebody that people didn't want to be bothered with too much because they said well they call you whatever (cannot understand) and all this kind of stuff and you didn't get too many allies that way.

MJ: But you also talk about a particular kind of brand of potentially radical politics right?

AR: Say what now?

MJ: You're also talking about a potentially radical politics. And what were people in Saginaw's position on radical politics in the 60's?

AR: Well a lot of people you know, they was dissatisfied about the same things and they don't like a lot of, you know, what is happening but they are reluctant about trying to do anything about it you know. They don't want to speak out you know, they talk and express their dissatisfaction to me or, but they won't join you to do anything about it. That's the same was it was when I was working like you would have people that would complain to each other about what's happening but they wouldn't join you know to do something about it you know. Or you decide that you're going to do something about it, they just don't want anybody to know, don't want the man to know that he don't like this you see and so they would complain, complain, it's just the same thing like when I was working. I tell you I said let's get the committee man and they would complain, complain but they would complain but nobody would join to get the committee man to fight, they don't want to confront the foreman and say get me the committee man you know. And then I'll get the committee man and sometimes change the whole situation and make it better for everybody but they watching me saying man he going to get fired you know, and all this kind of stuff and they watching me and then sometimes the result of me getting the committee man, they will make it better for these guys but they wouldn't do anything. So you have a lot of people like that now, they dissatisfied about some things but they won't say nothing, they want somebody else to go to bat for them.

MJ: So you found that all over? The neighborhood and at work?

AR: Yeah you'll find that, yeah so that's the way that I've just been doing things and I find out a lot of what will happen you know, you learn more about approaching the situation or whoever is involved, you don't know what people will do unless you go in and approach them about some things, you don't know what they will do, you don't know what they will say so sometimes you find out there are human and sometimes you find out that as long as you don't complain they will just use you. They know, see like when I used to tell the foreman about the same things you know like I told you about, my friend told me he said tell the foreman you got too much work. And then when I told the foreman he said who told you that. See, I'm not suppose (sic) to know.

MJ: Right.

AR: I'm new and I'm not suppose (sic) to know. And so who told you that. And then a lot of people would say he told me and therefore would be messing with him. I said nobody tell me, I got sense enough to know when I got too much of work, that's what I tell them. So there's a lot of people that don't like things but they just won't say anything about it.

MJ: So the neighborhood started to change when people started moving out and so people . . . about what year does that moving out . . . does that kind of end and there becomes a . . . has there reached a stable place where the neighborhood doesn't seem like it's changed a lot?

AR: Yes this look just about the same for the last ten or fifteen years you know, just look like just about the same. I don't see nothing too much. You see these gangs and things around you know.

MJ: Now are the gangs new?

AR: I don't know a heck of a lot about them you know because like I say I'm not out there. I see, or I hear you know about them but so far as me knowing too much about it, that's not my life you know, not out there.

MJ: So in the 60's and 70's was there any of that kind of activity?

AR: Not as much as it is now.

MJ: So what do you think it would take for this neighborhood to shift? To you know maybe become more like it used to be in terms of a more cohesive community?

AR: Well people, we need more people that care in the area. Like, like now there was a time when I used to like the people next door here, this little house that Mr. Ford used to live in, the little house right next door here, and there was people across the street here, the house is tore down

now, but when these people was around, was living and around the neighborhood you could . . . when you went out of town or something you could leave your key, like I could leave my key with my neighbor and they would watch my house for me you know. So like now these people moved out, the people over here they died, a lot of the people you know passed you know, the people that used to live over here they moved out, but most of the people that was in this area, when I moved in here or that moved in here after me you know, shortly after or what not, we was just good neighbors and would watch out for each other. So some of them moved out and most of them is dead, most of them died you know and so then new people move in and then these people, and the people that move in don't own their houses like I was saying so (cannot understand) so you got people around here that you don't know you know. You got different people, these people move out here and some other people move in that you don't know, you know you just lose that closeness you know. And one other thing what happened is like the children that grew up here, when they grow up you know in most cases they moves anyway, you know they leave town or move into a different neighborhood or something then leave the older people and eventually the older people die or what not you know and you still, you're changing, your neighbors changing, people changing and then the children they going to stay in a better neighborhood. Like my children okay, they all live somewhere else.

MJ: In Saginaw?

AR: I have a daughter, Mona she live down on Wisner in a house that I own down the street here, but I have a daughter that live in Detroit, or in Romolus rather near the airport and then I have a son living in Cincinnati, Ohio and I have one heading out to Georgia, she was raised up here and one living up further north okay. And just like my children leave the other children leave the same way you know. And the children you know that grew up like my children, along with my children, it's in a better communities, better neighborhoods you know. Go somewheres and go off and they go to school and they get more educated you know and they make more money and they want a better community to live in so they move somewhere else. And then like I was saying most of the people that care they live somewhere else and then you leave a group of people that don't care and I just happened to be one that just decided to stay here and wait.

MJ: So what made you decide to stay?

AR: Well one thing was that I paid for my home and I wasn't ready to go into debt for another one and I'm comfortable here you know, this is, I know there is better homes than I have, I know this is an old home but I'm satisfied with it because I know where I came from and I'm willing to just let my children get the nice homes and I visit them.

MJ: Now you said that own a house down on Wisner?

AR: Yeah.

MJ: Okay when did you decide?

AR: It's on Douglas but it's on Douglas and Wisner.

MJ: Douglas and Wisner?

AR: It's across Hess.

MJ: So when did you decide to buy a second home?

AR: Well I used to own . . . I had four or five houses at one time you know, that was part of the way that I educated my childrens and made it without my wife working. See I was coming up in the Nation of Islam, that was part of what I got was Elijah Mohammad was my teacher and he was, his teaching was to do something for self, and stop throwing your money away, educate your childrens and do something for self you know and things like that. And so this is what started me to not want to give all of my life to the _____, you know on to somebody else okay, so I bought you know when I would get some extra money and I saw where I could get me a house, and it wasn't the best house but I learned how to do some little things myself you see and so I would buy what I could buy and I would fix it up and rent it. And I could help people that needed help and help myself at the same time. I could rent, I could fix the house up and make it liveable and rent it to people that really needed a place, people that was on aid and wasn't able to get into other places, and people that had problems renting from other people I would rent to them because I didn't see them like being the kind of people that other people say them being. I wasn't hard on people you know. If they needed a place and I had a place I would rent it to them. I didn't belong to the Landlord Association, I wouldn't belong to it because nobody tell me how to treat people, cuz they don't belong to me. You see that how God is being the supreme and all of us being his children belonging to him and I just, I wanted to help people and at the same time it helped me you see. And a lot of people didn't treat me right but I didn't even care. People moved into my house and I fixed them up real nice you know and people move into them and you know I wasn't hard hearted you know, if they didn't have any money I wouldn't put them out, I would give them a chance to pay and sometimes they would get behind with the rent and tear the place up and move, I just let them go in there and fix the place up and rent it to somebody else. And I did that and I made money and I'm sure I helped people and I never worried about somebody getting behind with rent. I never tried to collect from them, never took anybody to small claims for anything or try to sue them, if they owed me I would just let them go and just keep moving and I think God bless me and so that was what started me to doing that was the kind of teaching I got from, I call him Master Elijah Mohammad, ya see and what got me to following him was the way I had been treated you know, coming from the south and the way I was treated by people. And then his teaching, it was a racial teaching but I thought it was very appropriate at that time, I said well this man got (cannot understand) and telling him he's the devil and all this and that he had a program to help me, I said I'm fine like this you know and

I wasn't really thinking about religion but it was just the brotherhood you know and what he was teaching you know. I thought it was good and I just started to follow him and then I was led right into the mainstream of the religion okay, and I got to be one of the ministers you see and that was, the teaching was to do something for self. And then I would try to you to love yourself, love your own kind you know, treat them good and you know and I've been (cannot understand) and all and this kind of stuff I'm just trying to help people, then I found out that if you try to help people and you try to do the right thing and you put God first he really won't let them hurt you too much because he controls the heart of people see and there were people who didn't treat me right and would ask me, and would tell me put me out, and I said no, no I'm not going to put you out, I'm not going to put you out, I'm not going to do that you see, and I say well I would tell them you know that I would appreciate if you would give me a break you know, if you know you can't pay, you know you can't, I can't stay at my house for that and I own it, I have to pay so I know you know you can't stay here forever and not pay you know. They would either move or pay or do something I never put anybody out and I said I'm not going to put you out you know. But they would move or do something but I never had to do it. So I just felt like God would see that the right thing was done without hurting me too much. I had one person who . . . go, go, go away now, go in your room . . . so he tell me he says, he told me to put him out and I told him I said well no I'm not going to put you out but I had a garage right next to the house. And I said no I'm not going to put you out but I said I'll tell you what you do, I said I got a garage out there, I said why don't you just move your stuff in the garage and I said it's nice and stay in there until you can find your place and let me clean this place up and rent it cuz I got to rent it. So he said okay. So he moved into the garage, I cleaned the place up and I rented it to a white lady and he was a Mexican so the white lady got in there and said he's not going to use my lights and she cut the lights off and he moved out.

MJ: So it all worked out?

AR: Yeah, she put out the lights and she put him in the dark and she wouldn't let him get no water. No she wouldn't let him use the light so he moved out.

MJ: You didn't have to do it though?

AR: I didn't have to do anything, I just told him he could move in the garage you know, I said so I had lights to it and everything, it was nice when he moved in and she moved in and said no I'm cutting his stuff off, he ain't using my lights.

MJ: Well I have two more questions and one is at what point did you buy your first . . . well this was your first house that you purchased. At what point did you then buy your second?

AR: Okay what happened like I say is the second house I was . . . I bought this house okay from Mrs. Ducant and she had a son living in the same house that my daughter live in now down

the street and it was another little house right beside that house that this house was too large for her and he wanted her, he bought the little house for her to move into the little house right next to him where he could look after her. And so he like how I treated his mother, I pay her a little and I took care of the house and he said he was raised up in this house and he liked that. And he told me he says . . . he came down one day and talked to me, he says I'm going to retire and he says I want you to have . . . he said I like how you treat my mother and I got these two houses I want to get rid of them, and he said if you take them I'll give you a good deal. I wasn't even thinking about houses really and so he said come down and look at them and I'll give you a good deal on them. And I told him I wasn't interested in no houses at the time and I hadn't really thought about it, so but see this is the way God work though too so I went down, I looked at the houses and what he did, this is what he did, he said if you buy this house from me he say I will, and at that same time we were saying Caucasian was the devil you know at the same time. And he said if you buy this house from me, the house he living in, he said I got this house up for sale for \$14,000. He said if you give me \$8,000 cash, if you can get me \$8,000 cash dollars for this house he said I'll sell it to you for \$8,000. He said I give you the other house, the little house that his mother was living in. He said I give it to you. He says I just want you to have it. He said I like how you treat my mother and I raised up in that house, I like how you take care of the house, he said I'm going to retire, I'm going up north and he said and I just want to do that for you. And I told him I said well I said what can I do, so I got a hold of the \$8,000 and I gave it to him.

MJ: Did you go to the bank or?

AR: Yes and the bank so ah so I got the two houses from him. And then after I got these two houses from him then I bought the house, there's a store front place over there I bought that from this guy and I bought two more houses . . .

[TAPE 2 STOPPED MID SENTENCE]
