

Leonard Harris

Where: Sumner-Ramer School African American Museum and Archive

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Location: Martinsburg, WV

Interviewer: Emily Hilliard

Transcription: Emily Hilliard

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With his wife, Leonard Harris (b. Martinsburg, WV, October 30, 1936) is the co-founder of Sumner-Ramer School African American Museum and Archive in Martinsburg, West Virginia. He is an alumnus of Sumner-Ramer, which was the Black school in Berkeley County during segregation. The school closed in 1965, one year after schools in the county were integrated and 10 years after the Brown v. Board ruling. The Sumner-Ramer Museum and Archive is located in a ground-floor room of the school building and contains materials from the school and its alumni, including ephemera, photos, artifacts, portraits, and more.

LH: Leonard Harris
EH: Emily Hilliard

HarrisLeonard.wav
00:00

LH: Several years ago they put this plaque outside...

EH: Oh yeah.

LH: That was J.R. Clifford. He was very active in--he was the first Black lawyer in the state of West Virginia and he was involved sort of like 50 years ahead of his time doing, it was a trial he was involved in.

EH: Okay.

LH: And also he was the principal at this school. So there's a lot of write-ups about this gentleman in the state of West Virginia. Yeah, J.R. Clifford. Like I said, he was about 50 years ahead of his time. Like the board first--Brown versus...

EH: Brown v. Board of Education?

LH: Yeah, yeah, yeah. The things that he was fighting for were similar to what they ended up...that Thurgood Marshall was involved in.

EH: Okay.

LH: But this is, these are just some different things. This is an article from [door slams] Different awards I got.

EH: Nice!

LH: Citizen of the year and so on.

EH: So what is the Heritage Festival? What happens at the Heritage Festival?

LH: This is something they have here every year. This really doesn't, it's not involved in this.

EH: Oh okay, okay.

LH: But and this gentleman here, and like I said, this is Mr. Ramer.

EH: Okay.

LH: And I don't know if you...this school here started out when you come in this school, you come in the elementary, and you went from elementary to, you stayed here all 12 grades, years. And this is the man who sorta took over the school in the young years and renovated it from the different rooms which it was and becoming the principal until 1946. He died and then they named this school after him. Before, like I said, it was Sumner School and Sumner School was named after a lot of legislators in the state. They named the schools and different things all for a lot of people who was involved in the government.

EH: Okay.

LH: And if you look at him, like I said, this was an all-Black school, you know and some people look at this gentleman and they think he's Black, but he's not Black.

EH: Ah!

LH: You did too, huh?

EH: Well I wasn't sure, it says African-American.

LH: Yeah, yeah. Well when you look at it, you know? Some people don't read it and they look at that and they see the...so this is the name of it and so on. Maybe I can take you in here.

EH: Okay!

03:18

LH: These are some of the trophies and some of the pictures and different things. These are some of the graduating diplomas. These are the way the diplomas used to be. And one of the things--this is the graduating class of that diploma, and this is my mother on this. I always tell somebody. Look at the way they was dressed.

EH: Yeah.

LH: And so on. This was about 1924.

EH: Okay.

LH: Supposed to be one of the first classes after it was renovated, that come out of here. And that was Mr. Ramer then.

EH: Oh yeah.

LH: And also that was the, let's see...let's see here. There was a picture here I was gonna.

EH: Why weren't there any--was that just the girls in the class or were there only girls graduating here?

LH: Well you got some here only boys.

EH: Oh yeah.

LH: One time it was only 4 in the class.

EH: Wow.

LH: And so it wasn't a very large group. I guess a couple hundred kids. But within that group, you know, if I understand it, you look, we had bands and we had, we won a state trophy for basketball and so many other different things. It's almost like, you had so little, but what you had you took advantage of it. And but--this girl here, Vicky Bullet. You heard of Vicky Bullet?

EH: Nope.

LH: She's an Olympic star.

EH: Oh wow!

LH: Yeah, she won--right here--she played for the Women Professional Basketball [WNBA] and this is a group here and this is one of the times we had a band and but then this is the last group that come out of the school. You ever go to Walmark (?) here? I guess you haven't.

EH: I haven't, no.

LH: There's a girl that's out there. She's on the walking. They call her Lulu. That's Lulu right there.

EH: Aw. She's the littlest one.

LH: Yeah, yeah.

EH: They made her stand on the chair?

LH: Yeah, yeah. And but...Now when you asked me, what all do you really want to know here?

EH: Well I'm interested in what the community is like now as well. So are there reunions at the school?

LH: No. The school, they used to til the last 8 or 9 years. When you go back and you look at this school for the years, it's like a lot of the people are older and they dissolve and they get older and there's no one to take over the young people it's...they just don't get involved. We used to have fantastic reunions every year. They come from all over. We had, some of 'em had never been back here for 50 years. This is my wife.

EH: Hi!

LH: This lady had been--was trying to get in touch with you.

Mrs. Harris: Oh with me?

EH: Yeah. Hi, I'm Emily Hilliard. Nice to meet you!

Mrs. Harris: You too! I know a got the message, but I said, I don't have a meeting...

EH: That's okay!

LH: This is not...

Mrs. Harris: That's what I had.

LH: The ones that had the date when we started and all? Remember the bulk, the paper that we used to read off to the people?

Mrs. Harris: Yeah?

LH: I'm sure you took that.

Mrs. Harris: I'm sure it'll be in this notebook, so let me go out and look at the notebook.

07:59

LH: But yeah, so these are the things, what is happening is, we used to have fantastic--they would come here and it would be reunion for 3 days and Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, they would go to church, the whole group. Some of 'em hadn't been back because it was during the segregation time and this school was going, when it was a Black elementary and high school it was, and some of the people they couldn't get jobs when they come out of school so they left here and they never come back, so when we had the reunion, it was 30 or 40 years that these people had ever been back in this city or in this school. So it was a great thing for 'em. And was a great celebration. I was trying to see...Well this picture here, this is, this is the one here. This is the class of '46. This is the year that Mr. Ramer died and my wife's mother is on this picture. Margaret Singleton.

EH: Okay.

LH: She is. It's just... but I think...see here they had, this is some majorettes. That's some of the bands, and this is one, this is our banner. When you go in there you look on the wall and this is the same flag that we used to march down called Apple Blossom, Cherry Blossom [Festival] in Washington, D.C. and other places.

EH: Okay! Wow.

LH: That was a school teacher Mrs. Chilton and this is a musical teacher, Miss Queenie Whims (sp?).

10:33

EH: Are these alumni?

LH: Those are the ones that have passed. Sort of like a little memorial section. Different ones. I hope to get another case where we can put these in and have 'em real neat. We haven't been able to. Another thing we've been trying to find some kind of way where we might get another grant because we do not--all this is donations and we...so...

EH: Where did your grant come from before?

LH: From the state.

EH: Okay.

LH: They gave us a grant. It's been several, quite a few years ago.

EH: Okay, 'cause my organization gives grants. That's not what I do but I could put you in touch with our grant manager if you want.

LH: We bought these cases and different...what I would like to go, and we'd like is I'd like to put everything in here on computer, or hire...and this way if there were ever to be a fire in here, we would lose everything.

EH: Right.

LH: And that's the only way we could keep it. And then when people like you and other people come in, we can have, put it on film and show it and run it. And then you can sit down in here for a half an hour, 45 minutes and look and get all your information off of it.

EH: Yeah, I actually just heard of a grant through the National Endowment for the Humanities that would be sort of digitizing all the materials, so I can send that to you also.

LH: This is the lady here, she just passed. This is Mrs. Hill. She was 107 years old when she died. And she was a teacher here. And these are the dresses that this lady Mrs. Plowden (sp?) ...they had these plays here and before this school was integrated, this wall wasn't here, and they used to have it on the other side there's a small stage and that's where they used to have plays and different things. And where you are now, this was sort of like a grade school area. When you went upstairs, it become the high school.

EH: Okay.

LH: It was. (to wife, in other room) I remember when I say this, I thought...

14:22

EH: That's okay, I don't need it. I can just take one of those. One of these.

LH: Okay.

EH: So could I ask you a little bit about how you came to create the museum?

LH: Yeah.

EH: I'll have you introduce yourself first and say your name and when and where you were born.

LH: My name's Leonard Harris. I was born in Martinsburg, West Virginia. 10/30/36. I was a student at Sumner School and when it become Ramer School. Then I did not graduate from this school. I went in the service during the Korean War and finished my education.

EH: Okay. And how did you come to create this archive and museum?

LH: Well as the years went by, they started having in the earlier years, it was a few people took on and they started having the reunions. Then after that they start slacking off and they wasn't having 'em any more. So I got to be a member of this committee and someone had to go with it. And so one of the things was with the museum, how I got the part of it, was the school board in Martinsburg, they had a budget and they over, um, they over-spent their budget and meanwhile I got word from somebody on the board that said that they was gonna tear this building down. And me, being a person that was an activist in this town and been very much involved in a lot of the Black properties and different things, and I just did not believe and think it was right for them to tear this building down. So I took it on myself and we formed a board and we started protesting sorta against the board for 3 years. And then after that we won it. So the board decided they said, well since we, since you want this building. No go back--it was, we went to the board and then what they was gonna do was the board, they was short on finances. They was gonna sell this school, Birch Street (sp?) School and Winchester School, Street School. And they were gonna sell 'em to get money in their budget. And I said before you sell this school we will stand in front of the bulldozer, because they was gonna knock it down and form an outlet. Blue Ridge Outlet was very powerful in this area. And they was gonna make an outlet and we said no. And they said what is life

without history? So during that time the school board found out, well we got the city involved, we had the state, they got involved, the courthouse, the county, and then they decided that they wanted to get on board with us. Well that made us much more stronger. And finally the school decided, they said okay, they said we decide we're gonna give you all this building. And we didn't want the building, you know? This is a maintenance and everything over this building--it's a big building. And so it's almost like hey, you know, you call wolf here and so well when they come up about 6 month, they were gonna give it to us like in July. Like it is now. We were supposed to turn it over. I guess in May I get a phone call from the board, from the superintendent. They said, "We'd like to have a meeting with you Mr. Harris." I said "sure." And so when they did they said, "We like to instead of giving you this building, we need these things now because we found out we got money and these buildings are very sturdy, we want to keep 'em going. And we want to..." And if you notice out there, there are activities going on in this building, 'cause the Board of Education owns this building. They said, "We want to keep on continuing."

So at that time I went and I knew I was in--I had 'em over a barrel here now. So I said to myself, well, I'm gonna act a little hard because really I don't want this building, but since they want it now, I'm gonna try to get something here. So I said "Okay, you can take the building back, all we want is a museum." So from that day on--first they gave me that small little closet out there. And then later we got this room. And then I contacted the people with the archives and all and I asked 'em if they would donate different things to us. And these are family members and different things that they had these sitting on the back of the chairs. Each one of them paid for the chairs and they got their names of their families on them. Some of them are dead and some of them are not dead. But this is how it started.

20:34

EH: So were you already connected still to a lot of people who attended this school? You kept in touch with people who...

LH: Yes, yes. I...after we got the building and right before then we was started having, was involved in during these school reunions. So then when we got the building, it kind of gave us more because then the people started, when they were having the reunion, they would come in here and this would be one of the stops. They would come and see the school because they haven't been back here. I know people, I kept records of their names and so on, so I knew...and then we had a lot of local people say, you know you're looking at back 20 years ago or whatever and a lot of the people are gone were passed now, but it was a good bit of people at that time and so we had meetings and different thing was going on and they was involved and everybody got on board because they didn't want to sit. So I had a good group. We had a board and everything and a 501 and we, you know, our charter and everything, so we had it organized pretty good.

EH: When was the last class to graduate out of this school?

22:01

LH: (mumbles, reading to himself) Trying to see here...

EH: Does it say in here?

LH: This is what, if you look here, this is the way it went until it closed.

EH: So '65 essentially.

LH: Yeah, yeah.

EH: Okay.

LH: In 1965. The school it start...I think it was in '60 they start integrating the schools and they did it gradually. So many each year. And the craziest thing however it was, at the time it was R.L. Franklin. When Mr. Ramer died in '46, Mr. Franklin become the new principal and when in '60 when they start integrating and they integrated the schools, so many classes each year, however they did it. And so when all the kids went to either Martinsburg High School or the grade schools around town, then you had a principal was left, was Mr. Franklin. So they said, "Okay what are we're gonna do with Mr. Franklin?" Well the thing is at that time, this was still a segregated community. And the people here was not ready to put a Black principal into a white school so they found a way for Mr. Franklin to resign, to retire rather than to put him...all the kids within the white schools. And another thing, at the time, they didn't want the white kids to come in this school because if they did then Mr. Franklin would be teaching them. So like I said, he resigned or yeah, he retired and so it was just according to them and different things, they don't admit this. But you have to look at the way things was because they never did have, to this day, you have never had a white principal, I mean a Black principal in this town, you know?

EH: Wow.

26:02

LH: But...

EH: So you graduated in '46? No...

LH: No, I didn't graduate here.

EH: Oh right, yeah.

LH: I left here in '55. I went in the Korean War.

EH: Okay, so you weren't around when they integrated?

LH: No, no, I was in the service then. I was doing the Korean War. And all this, and I come back after. But this...Mr. Franklin he was a, he ran the school and he just, he kept it going. And the craziest thing was, if you look here, even now after all the kids left in '64 I think it was, they closed the school down because they said it wasn't up to date and we want to condemn, we want to close this school. But really, truly, they didn't want white kids to come in this school. So the school really--now they condemned the school and then after one year of it being closed, they opened it back up for a vocational school where kids went through training like James--I don't know if you're familiar with James Rumsey and places. Technical school on.

EH: Yeah.

LH: And the craziest thing is, the school is supposed to be not up to date but you close it down this year but you open it up again and make it another school.

EH: Right.

LH: And from that day on, they have had all these different, the Board of Education have had different things in this school. On here...let's see here.

28:20

It's got on here, see here? It says, "What is Sumner-Ramer Memorial School Heritage?" A museum containing history dating back from 1867 to present.

EH: Okay. So have you lived, other than your time in the service, have you lived in Martinsburg for your whole life?

LH: Yeah, yeah. I've been in several businesses. We own a home healthcare agency here now. I've been in that business for 35 years. And so I, so yes, outside of me being in the service, I've been here in Martinsburg.

EH: And how have you seen the community change?

LH: Since they have integrated, there's been a lot of changes for the better. Seeing the kids go to the public schools. You know the difference too--there's been good changes and I was talking to some body not too long ago, you know you have to look at this, of the integration. And it's good and bad. The bad part is that everybody should be able to live under one law and there shouldn't be any separatism. But one thing about integration was, when you integrated and when the kids left, when they all lived, we called this The Hill--this whole area. If you look down there, that was some of the old condemned houses that used to be up in this area where Blacks lived. People knew each other. And just like you probably have heard, you know, you didn't worry about some of the things you see now because you had like people constantly was looking over their shoulders or this person, that person would see ya. And if you got a whippin' in school, you gonna get one at home. So I mean these are the kind of things. But, but, and also when they integrated, the kids started going to college, which is great. But then they left this area. The left so many times and still they leave, they go to Washington and places to get jobs because the jobs--there is a lot of jobs that's coming here--Proctor and Gamble, and different companies are coming here and a lot of Blacks are being hired. If they--qualification and they put their applications in. There is jobs. But then there's still a lot of prejudice and different things as segregation is being done different. You still have a lot of segregation but it's just being done different. It's just being done--where it was openly, now it's behind closed doors.

EH: Mmhm.

LH: It is. But it is better. It is better, you know.

EH: So you're saying that the community, for one, it was a lot more cohesive so people were living in the same area and knew each other...

LH: Yes.

EH: ...and there was a locus for the community?

LH: Yes, yes. Like for instance, a lot of the pictures, people who as like for instance, the Mount Zion Methodist Church was across--it's still there--across the street. Interesting you've got really in these areas now, outside of this school are the churches. Outside of that, everything has been torn down and made apartments or homes and people have moved out of this area. Like I said, it was for the best because the houses did need to be condemned but you lost contact with people.

EH: Yeah.

LH: Now, and now you have a new generation of kids and they don't know. Kids, it's a different stage, you know? People who, in those days, everybody would come up and they'd shake hands and this and that. Kids will walk right over you nowadays or this and that. I'm not talking--see I'm an older man!

EH: (laughs)

LH: You know, but we have also--like Mr. Franklin, it's called Franklin Manors--those are big apartments--and this was named after Mr. Franklin. Then you have the Ramer Court and it's right up the street here and it was named after Mr. Ramer. And so many different things. And we just put a park in up here, the Martin Luther King Park, which I was involved in that. I had it done--I got a grant for it.

EH: Okay!

LH: And it really looks very nice.

34:18

EH: Nice.

LH: And it being worked on. And all of this, a lot of, now this church goes back years. I mean--the church--This school goes back years ago. When the school was first started it was missionaries who come from Maine and they was white and they was the teachers and they would take the Black families and at the time, the school was across the street, some of it. And they would teach the mothers and the fathers at night because they worked in the day time. So that's, and there's a church down here, down the street 1 block, called, it used to be the Dudley Baptist Church. Now it's named Destiny Church. That's sort of like a mother of this school because Dudley was one of the missionaries, her name was, who was some of the first teachers. And like I said, this was white people, white, I'm trying to think what you call the group of people that come in from Maine...it's sort of like a religion.

EH: Hmm.

LH: But let's see. I might have it here. (leafs through papers)

EH: Was this sort of 1800s?

LH: Well, yeah, yeah. This goes back. Oh here they are. From Boston.

EH: Okay.

LH: Let's see (reading) "What do you know about..." This was abolition. That was one of the ones where some of the school was named after. See here?

EH: Okay, Anti-slavery Free Soil Party.

LH: Mmhm.

EH: Okay, so abolitionists?

LH: Yeah, yeah. He was a man who--He was sort of protesting in court about slavery and how this should be integrated and there was a man who take a cane or club and hit him in the head and knocked him down in like a court session. And it was the cause of him, I think ended up his illness. He died. I think it says here, let me see. (reading)

37:10

I was trying to see the teacher's name on here. Also, see here? It says some of the bricks in this building was brought up from John Brown Arsenal in Harper's Ferry?

EH: Uh-huh.

LH: They brought 'em up here.

EH: Okay.

LH: Let's see..."What is your mission and goal?" This is the thing we said, "Without history, there is no life. Every human being should be cherished. The past, the history of Sumner-Ramer is more the history of schools. It is the life of negroes in Berkeley County."

EH: So one of the other things I'm doing with this is I'm interviewing people who have knowledge of a community's history but then also traditional artists and so that could be singers, you know gospel singers, it could be home cooks who make traditional recipes. Are there other people in the Black community here who I should talk to?

LH: It probably would have been good if you would have talked to my wife!

EH: Well I tried!

LH: She's a musician.

EH: (laughs)

LH: But she doesn't really know what's going on, you know?

EH: Yeah, yeah. So what does she play?

LH: She's a singer! She sings for Senator Byrd and all different singers and so on.

EH: What kind of music does she sing?

LH: A little bit of everything! Gospel, old-time gospel, she can tell you some of the songs. She can rap, sing, get down!

EH: (laughs) Well I'll have to come back.

LH: Yeah! But you're asking me these things and really I...sometimes see I'm not in the school to really keep up on a lot of this so unless I come over here and really go back over it, I forget a lot of this.

EH: That's okay. Yeah. Well, I had also seen some, I think in Charles Town, there's another African American organization and festival and I was trying to get in touch with them but I am blanking on his name.

LH: Jimmy Tolbert?

EH: I don't think that was the one I found, but...so the last name starts with a K. James or Jimmy Kanza or something like that?

LH: Jim Kelmer (sp)?

EH: I don't think so.

LH: Um...I know...[George] Rutherford?

EH: That might have been one of him.

LH: There are people who are involved in the NAACP and Tolbert is very well known.

EH: Okay. I sent them a message but I don't think there was a name attached, cause they have a website.

LH: Yeah, they have a good bit of history. The man right there, he was one of the first officers... (walks away)

EH: Okay.

LH: He's from down in that area, he was. But you haven't been able to contact them?

EH: I haven't heard back from him yet, but...

LH: You want to talk to one of them?

EH: I don't know if I could today, but eventually! Could I write their number down?

LH: What I can do is, I can, you can talk to 'em and set up an appointment or tell them you're gonna call them.

EH: Yeah.

LH: Sometimes when you send something to an email, people don't know how you are.

EH: Yeah. Yeah, sure if you want to introduce me! I probably can't do it while I'm here this trip but I could, if I have your introduction that would be helpful.

LH: What I'll...

42:52

George Rutherford. You wanna write this down?

EH: Sure. I think that is one of the names I had found.

LH: These are the top, really considered the top Blacks in history in Jefferson County. These are the names I'll give you.

EH: Okay, George Rutherford.

LH: Yeah.

EH: Okay.

LH: (304)735-9610

EH: Okay.

LH: Got it?

EH: Yep.

LH: Wait a minute--I'm gonna give you one more. If you want any kind of information, these are the people. Jim Tolbert.

EH: Okay. T-A-L...

LH: T-O-L-B-E-R-T.

EH: Okay.

LH: And his phone number is (304)725-7852.

EH: Alright, and are they Charles Town?

LH: Charles Town.

EH: Okay. So do you still have an annual event with the museum at all?

LH: No, what we, only time when they have the historical, like you saw out there on the sign? Then we open it up because they always ask if the people can come. Also right during the Black History Month, we got a lot of people who comes in. Then we have schools. They have sorta I guess touring, wanting to see some of the Black History people and so on, and they bring 2 or 3 buses up here. And they schedule--I don't leave it open. I used to because some of the things that you got in here, I can't replace. And then when I used to leave it open, people instead of them coming to ask me to take a picture, they would take different things and then they don't return it so I would lose them.

EH: Yeah, yeah.

LH: But there's, it shows you too of how some people have so little. In some of those books down there, the writing in 'em. It's really fantastic some of the different things when you sit there and look at the writing. These people are handwriting and so on. And, but...

45:58

EH: And you said your mother had gone here. What do you know of your family's history here?

LH: I just know that my mother graduated from here. You know, it's funny when you talk about back in those years, people didn't talk that much, you know? And really that's all I really know. And the thing was, in those days, in the beginning they only went to the 8th grade. And then they, some of the ones would leave here and go to Storer College. That's in Harper's Ferry.

EH: Uh-huh.

LH: Which most likely, these gentlemen [in Charles Town] will tell you about Storer College.

EH: I saw an exhibit at WVU and the Niagara Movement about it.

LH: Well that is the man I was telling you about, J.R. Clifford.

EH: Oh yeah.

LH: He was one of the charter members of the Niagara Movement.

EH: Okay.

LH: And it's in probably in this paper here and so on. It's from Harper's Ferry. And they all went to Storer College, they did. But maybe you ask me some questions because I...

EH: (laughs) Yeah, yeah. So trying to think what else.

LH: This school here was one of the first brick buildings construction for Negroes in Berkeley County. Well really opened in 1917, it was. This was the first brick building of all the other schools in this Berkeley County.

EH: And now most of the community you would say, the Black community here centers around the churches?

48:01

LH: You mean live around 'em?

EH: Well, what's the community center? Where do you see people, it's mostly at church or are there other...?

LH: Probably so. Probably would be the churches. I don't see the community as much as probably as a lot of other Blacks because I do not go to a local church. I'm Catholic and really truly we don't have that many Black Catholics in Berkeley County. And the church I go to is...but there is Destiny, like I say, and Mount Zion Methodist Church and Ebenezer's Church and Lilly of the Valley. These are churches around. And there are quite a few other churches, but these are ones that a lot of the people mostly go to.

EH: Is there a Catholic church in Martinsburg?

LH: Yeah, yeah. Saint Joseph Church. Queen Street.

EH: Okay.

LH: It is. But so that's been my church my whole family, they went to church there. My kids graduate at the school there and but those things happened in the later years. They opened up.

EH: Yeah.

LH: But... (leafs through papers)

49:54

Here what it says here (reading) "What is Summer School Heritage Incorporation"? It was a group of people that attended both schools decided to form an alumni work to save the school and its history. In the years, we had people...when this school was segregated, the kids come from, they come from an area they call Bunker Hill which was about 15 miles from here at a place called Girard (?) Town, George Town. That's about 16, 17 miles. And all these kids, all the kids come from different counties, they come to this school because they didn't have any other school. And there was kids come from Paw Paw, West Virginia and they would catch a, they had a bus and the bus would stop down on Queen Street and they would let them out. They had special tickets and that was like 30 some, 40 miles away from here. They would travel from that distance to come here.

EH: At least, right?

LH: Pardon?

EH: Maybe even more?

LH: Where?

EH: Paw Paw

LH: Paw Paw? Could be.

EH: Yeah.

LH: But we had people come from Paw Paw come here.

EH: That's a long bus ride.

LH: And so, and one thing about the school is, people didn't, the school never closed. Like when we had snow and stuff like that, the ones that lived here, we walked to school and the ones that couldn't get in by the buses and so on, what they would do is, they would have to make it up. So unless you know, we walked to school in knee-high, whatever deep in snow, unless it was no way possible, you come to school. Wouldn't close no school because you don't have air conditioning or you don't have this and that. No, you come to school.

And really and truly some of us, where you got a decent meal by coming to school, because our homes, our mothers and fathers, they did the best they could, but sometimes they're lacking in different meals where we had a nice lunch, very good home cooked food, a cafeteria and it was very nice.

EH: Okay, so there were actual cooks making lunch. Not like they have, they heat it up today?

LH: No, no, no, no. These was Mrs. Plowden, the lady I tell you with the dress back there?

EH: Uh-huh.

LH: She was a cook and they would have, a lady, she would come in in the morning and they would have a 4-course meal. It was nice. It had milk, you didn't get--the parents couldn't afford for us to come there and everybody. And then we had, we participated in a lot of things. Like I said, the band with the Apple Blossom. You got a school around here, Martinsburg High School, they don't even go to the Apple Blossom. You heard of the Apple Blossom?

EH: Cherry Blossom?

LH: No the Apple. Yeah the Apple Blossom.

EH: And where is that?

LH: Winchester, Virginia.

EH: Ah, so they have apple, DC has cherry.

LH: Yeah. And then they had a thing at the Cherry Blossom in Washington they would have it, which I don't even know if Martinsburg High School--that's one of the largest schools around here. If they ever, we was invited. Our band was. And they used to enjoy our band because we played a different classical music. The white bands they kinda slow, whatever.

EH: (laughs)

LH: And we played a lot of rhythm and they could hear us. You could see the people patting their feet and we was jamming, going down the street, you know.

EH: Did you play in the band?

LH: Yeah, yeah. That's my bugle. That was when we had a bugle corp. We started out with a drum and bugle corps. And then we went from a bugle corps to a band but we had...And these are our colors. Our colors, you see blue and white. These are our colors.

EH: Uh-huh okay.

LH: It is. But it was a lot of you know, like I said we had...in the schools like you'll probably hear, all the books and all were hand-me-down books. You know, when we got our books we could see the white kids names in 'em, that they hand 'em down to us. But we was glad. It was something that like I said you had so little but you were so proud to get it. But...

EH: Do you remember any of what they would serve for lunch--what sort of things?

LH: I remember one thing was corned beef. Corned beef, I guess mashed potatoes I guess, and then they had like cheese sandwiches or something. These things, just was no big knock down turkey dinners or steak dinners or porterhouse or something.

EH: Yeah, I'm always just curious about food.

LH: Just something that a kid wouldn't be able to get at home that can give him--you might have grilled cheese sandwiches and some milk and maybe a salad. You know, something that and they would--they had I can remember too, a group of us used to go to Cherry Blossom. They used to have a patrol group and this patrol group, it was, we thought, oh we thought that was really big because special ones in different rooms, you was, they would name you as your grade. Have you ever heard of being a patrolman?

EH: I don't know.

LH: Well you have a belt across you and come around you and tie.

EH: Okay.

LH: And then on the belt about the size of this you had a badge that go on it. And what you would do, you'd be a patrolman just like a policeman. And you would go out there on the street when the people and the school would let out and you could hold the traffic up. Well they would invite the patrolmen to come to Cherry Blossom. So that's a kind of special group. You're one of the good kids and so on and so on.

EH: Yeah, we call that the crossing guard.

LH: Yeah, or whatever. And so this is all these kinda little thing. And like I said, it would invite the band and invite the patrolmen and so on. But...

EH: And then what sports did you have?

LH: We had football, basketball, that was about it.

EH: No baseball?

LH: No, no. What you see here, these here are our when we say your heritage as kids whose parents went to school here. Like Vicky Bullet's brother. The bat. Those are some of the people who went to school here, that's their skates. You ever wore those kind of skates?

EH: Not really that kind! I had some similar like Fisher-Price roller skates.

LH: They got a key. You ever see the one with the keys?

EH: Yeah, yep.

LH: And that key will fit every screw on that skate. The key is on there. And there's a pair of shoes there, those shoes belong to a fellow by the name of John Brown. He lives right up here about 2 blocks up the street. He's the fastest guy that was around here. He was a football player.

EH: Okay.

LH: And I played with him playing football.

EH: Okay! And then Vicky Bullet, she didn't go here but her parents did? Or she did go here?

LH: She didn't go here, neither did Scotty.

EH: Okay.

LH: That's Vicky over here. One of her thing. So this is not only the alumni but it's the heritage that bring it on down to the kids. Anybody whose family went to school here, you're a part of the organization, you know?

EH: Cool.

LH: There's a lady there. She's Alpha (sp?) Plowden. She used to be one of the cooks here. She did. But... You know who that guy is [pointing at a photo of President Obama].

EH: Oh yeah!

LH: They gave him, they would give him a heck of a time.

EH: Oh I know. I think he should just stay. (laugh)

LH: No, they'll kill him.

EH: Yeah.

LH: They might kill him.

EH: He's probably glad to leave but I just wish he could stay.

LH: I think he would, but his wife and family, I think they'd be glad to leave. You know, we as people are scared something's going to happen to him. Cause there are some crazy people out here.

EH: I know. Well we're gonna miss them a lot. Just having them in the office. Anyway, is there anything else you'd like to add?

LH: Well would you like to see the building?

EH: Sure, yeah!

LH: Come on, I'll walk you around.

EH: Okay.

1:00:46

END OF TAPE

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LH: This is Walter Brandon (sp?) He was the Chief of Police up in Sewickley, Pennsylvania.

EH: Okay.

LH: He went to school here. This lady's family right here, these are Woodses and to show you how things are, this fella here, he's a lawyer and all of them here are lawyers and doctors. This man here, he gave a

big donation. There's a scholarship fund that they give scholarships out of every year and he gave 'em 100,000 dollars.

EH: Wow.

LH: He did. And that's really big. But and you take the Woods family, this is these people. They all became doctors, lawyers and so on. So it shows you, you know the different things that can happen.

EH: Yeah.

01:02

LH: And this is a band my father was in.

EH: Oh wow! That's cool.

LH: Yeah.

EH: Maybe I should bring my camera. Let me grab it. Alright.

LH: So many people when they see these teachers, they think they're white. That's Miss Chilton. And then I think this... [footsteps] [to someone else] Hi! I have a lady here from Morgantown. Morgantown?

EH: Charleston.

LH: Charleston.

EH: Hi!

Receptionist: Hi!

LH: And this is Emily.

Receptionist: And Donna.

LH: Donna.

EH: Nice to meet you.

Receptionist: Yeah, nice to meet you too!

LH: And she's looking around the school and taking information and they put it into Morgantown...

EH: An archive.

LH: An archive.

EH: Yeah, WVU Library.

LH: In Morgantown, West Virginia. So I'm showing her around our beautiful school.

Receptionist: Alright! Yes! It's got a lot of character!

EH: Yes.

LH: So we can just go through here?

Receptionist: Sure. They're in there in a meeting with their door shut.

LH: I know, I'm just gonna go around here.

Receptionist: Yeah, yeah. That's fine!

02:58

END OF TAPE

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LH: [footsteps] This is what they had...this is the Board of Education and they have all of this in here.

EH: Oh wow.

LH: See what happened was when they was gonna tear it down and it was because myself and my organization. Now they got all this in here!

EH: (laughs)

LH: Then we had to fight 'em to keep it up!

EH: Right, oh yeah.

LH: They want to come in here and use it until it deteriorate and they wanted to put nothing back so then we had to fight 'em again and say hey, you're using our building. This was our building.

EH: Yeah. Yeah, they have to maintain it.

LH: So now they start painting and doing things.

EH: That's good.

LH: But this was [footsteps] Hello! (knocks on door) How are you?

Receptionist 2: Good, how are you?

LH: Is it okay if we come in? I have a lady here from Charleston and she's looking at writing a history on schools.

Receptionist 2: Uh-huh.

LH: I just want to show her this room.

EH: So that's where the stage was?

Receptionist 2: Yeah, have a look around. I think pretty much everything was like...

LH: Oh I don't want...

Receptionist 2: Help yourself!

LH: Yeah, yeah. Now this used to be the stage before they put that partition in.

EH: Got it.

LH: It was. And there used to be...

Receptionist 2: There's still theatrics that go on on that stage.

EH: (laughs)

LH: What do they want to call--something go across...

EH: Oh a curtain? Yeah, yeah.

LH: A curtain, yeah.

EH: Yeah, they look down at you guys. Like the old factories.

LH: Mr. Ramer, the principal, that was his office.

EH: Ah, okay.

LH: And when you...

Receptionist 2: Sorry!

LH: And you hear 'em when you walk those steps. If you come in here at school at lunch time it would be 12:00 and if you come in here like 12:30 and you're trying to sneak in, you couldn't hide!

EH: Yeah, yeah. Right. Oh yeah!

LH: This is the way it's been...you don't sneak. He would call you to the office and when he call you to the office, you got a whipping!

EH: Uh-oh.

LH: Those days, you had a choice. Your choice was, how did you want that whipping? You'd either want it with the hand, 'cause I mean...or you drop your pants. That was gonna be...but it didn't kill us. [unintelligible] I didn't like it then.

EH: Yeah!

LH: This is where the high school was. [upstairs]

EH: Okay. Wow these look beautiful. Big windows.

03:14

LH: (to office worker) I'm showing her the school up here?

Worker: okay.

LH: And the way it was back in the years. And she's from Charleston.

Worker: Okay!

LH: And she's writing, getting the history on a lot of schools.

Worker: Great, great. We're just guests in the building.

LH: Oh yeah?

Worker: Yeah, we just did a training. We're just wrapping up so...

LH: Oh okay, we were not...this is the way the blackboards were. They're still in place, you know.

EH: That's cool. You don't even see blackboards anymore. It's all the white dry erase.

LH: No. [footsteps] When you see something like that and they take it out, but this is history. And they lose it. This is the school where the Board of Education... [unintelligible]

EH: Okay.

LH: And this, like I said, you walk from that side over here--all this was open.

EH: Okay.

LH: Yeah, that was...we can...

EH: We came up this way, yeah, so let's go.

LH: [footsteps] This is the office. See? Now all this was open so he could stand here. He could see everybody up there and everybody down there.

EH: (laughs)

LH: Mr. Ramer, he was the first principal and I mean at my time. Back in...but then you have the other principals. I have the names of them but...[footsteps] Aren't these some noisy steps?

EH: Yeah! Really noisy. [footsteps, doors opening, voices]

LH: I'm gonna take your doorstopper okay? This was where the cafeteria was. And then they had mechanical drawing back in that. [footsteps]

06:26

Cafeteria was back in here.

EH: Okay.

LH: And then we used to have this as the furnace room. People were scared to death, they used to say it was the boogie man.

EH: Oh yeah. We had one of those at my elementary school too.

LH: Yeah. Now this here was put on later. Here, it was. Let's see... [footsteps] [keys locking]

EH: Oh it is hot. [door closes] Oh yeah.

LH: This was put on here later.

EH: This reminds me of my elementary school gym.

LH: Yeah. And when the gym was put on and then, like I said, they condemned this. And there wasn't another gym in school outside of high school. The high school was better than this gym. All this was condemned because they wasn't ready. When they integrated, the thing was, they didn't want white kids to come to this school because one of the reasons, like I said, you had a Black principal. And they weren't ready for this Black principal to teach the white kids. So instead they took all the kids out of here and sent 'em all over the county.

EH: Wow.

LH: And then had the principal retire.

EH: That's crazy.

LH: Yeah, yeah.

EH: So do they still use this gym?

LH: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

EH: Okay.

LH: The rec board is coming in here and they're gonna probably put an air conditioner in it and do a lot of things because they're gonna start using it.

EH: Cool.

LH: They are.

EH: That's good!

LH: But then you have other groups come in and basketball and all--I don't know how they can stand it. It's so hot. They got fans I guess, they turn 'em on.

EH: Yeah. [footsteps out of the gym]

08:59

LH: Excuse me. [footsteps]

EH: Yeah, my elementary school is probably about the same era. They turned it into something now.

LH: Hmm?

EH: My elementary school was probably about the same era, but they still wanted to...

LH: In Charleston?

EH: No, it's in Indiana.

LH: Oh. Oh so you want to school in Indiana?

EH: Yeah.

LH: Indiana where you're getting your vice president from!

EH: No, I hope not!

LH: (laughs)

EH: Although he can stay away from Indiana. (laughs)

LH: They had a tough time with him.

EH: Yeah, my mom's a teacher, so and the way he balanced the budget was to take away teachers' pensions.

LH: Oh yeah?

EH: So I mean there's a lot of reasons not to like him but that's one that she's...

LH: Plus he doesn't want the gays and so on?

EH: Yeah. And he's well--he's just bad in lots of ways. He basically created an HIV epidemic because he was denying people health care, Planned Parenthood stuff. So he's done some terrible stuff.

LH: Oh yeah, yeah. You put that with Trump.

EH: Yeah.

LH: I see...

10:47

END OF TAPE

END OF INTERVIEW