

**Nathaniel L. Bowman Oral History Interview**

**Interviewer: Karen Vaneman, Asheville Urban Renewal Oral History Collection**

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Interviewee: Nathaniel Bowman (NB)

(KV): It's nice that he does.

NB: Yes, and he takes good care of us. He's..

KV: Uh-huh.

NB: Our medications separate, he separates it, keeps it and what not. And remember, he's got... My wife and myself.

KV: Right.

NB: You know.

KV: Two different kinds of medication to straighten out.

NB: And so... He's... He's real nice. Helpful.

KV: Would be.

NB: So, uh,

KV: So how long were you in the army then?

NB: Two years.

KV: Two years.

NB: Yeah, we was getting ready to go overseas and they gave me a choice that I could go with the army—I could reenlist—I was only drafted for two years—they told me I could reenlist and go to Germany. Or...I could just get a discharge. So I rather go to Germany, I took a discharge and... and there was... [?????] sergeant.

KV: Oh really?

NB: And so, I ended up back here in Asheville. So, uh, that's

KV: And that's when you decided to try to get an invitation to the black and white formal.

NB: Yes. I wanted[?] December. Things was happening and all, and I wanted to be out there. I was in my twenties. And I wanted to get out there and be a part of it. Which I guess is natural.

KV: Sure.

NB: And, uh, and that's where. So.

KV: So what... Uh-huh.

NB: My wife... My wife and I have always enjoyed the same thing. One thing is people. We, we enjoy people. And, uh, it's just too bad, uh, her illness brought on such a personality—a memory loss, and she's just not. She can't remember. And there was a time she could tell you everybody's *name*, who they was *kin* to, *anything* you wanted to know. She knew it. And now she ask me [????], “what street are we on?” And she just doesn't know.

KV: Oh really? When *did* you move here? On [Tirabu?]

NB: We been here about twenty-six years now.

KV: Oh, no kidding. So it's not a recent move.

NB: No. Not a recent move. And they, to turn the faucet on, or the lights, really she, she would take but it might come to her and it might not.

KV: Oh really? So she doesn't remember her children? Or does she?

NB: Children?

KV: Does she remember the children? Her children? Your children.

NB: Yeah. I ... uh, it is right now, yeah. She, yeah. But. If you asked her couple of hours later, she can hold a conversation with you just like you and I would. But after you walk out the door, she won't, she'da forgotten that you was ever here. Well now, she can go date way back, and talk about someone way *back*, but she can't bring it *up*. And then she has a, her vision is not good. So you don't hardly know where to place, to direct blame, on some of it. The vision, or the memory. It's some of both. [...?] Which makes it a little difficult.

KV: It would

NB: But, uh. And she, but. As a whole, to have such a different, a different personality, and. But. She doesn't like to be alone. And she can walk around the house, in the house, she just doesn't like to be alone.

KV: Oh, so the night you were at the NAACP was anybody here with her?

NB: No, the night that I came down to the banquet, uh, my brother, I mean, uh, which we call him Butch, he had gone to Greensboro to a football game. We take her over to her niece's house to get a hair piece. We told her, you know, so she stayed with her niece while I was at the banquet. Yeah. She wouldn't, she wouldn't stay by herself. And, uh, and if I told her that I was, say going to a banquet, well she would wanna go too. But I would have to, I said, "this is one of the few, I just wanted to, you know sometimes you just wanna, be by your, you know."

KV: Right. Not have to worry about your...

NB: You have to have her prepared for. And you have to have her tended, see. She requires... I don't mind at all. But every so often, you, if she'll ask the same question...[...] If, like they all, they all wonder is, "what's the date?" The day is Monday. "Do I go to that place today?" That's the daycare where she is. Yes or no, whatever, ok. And so then five or ten minutes later she'll ask, "what's today?" You got to go back over that. Now, if you take the time to explain, and she'll say thank you, but she'll come in right back again. She'll get off that, she's got off, well, after a period of time, it can go ahead and get a little old. You know some would say you got to have patience. And then you say, well, I say, well I think I'm gonna...run out. [...????...] At first she would, I would leave her alone, but I know she don't like to be alone. Now, she doesn't dial the—she used to a telephone, she'd answer the telephone all the time. That's why I sit on that part of the table, she sit on the other, near the telephone. 'Cause she—I got no phone call. She got the phone calls. But it's different now. She can't dial. Why? Because she can't see.

KV: Oh

NB: Uh-huh. Well now if she could talk on the phone, or if she answers the phone you've got to go to her quick and say "What do they want?" because, five or ten minutes later she's forgotten they called and who they was and so that's what you're up against. I read every book they have and she'd following the guidelines for a person that has her illness and it's just the idea that she's one of the thousands and thousands that has it. So yes... but she has no ill effects, she sleeps good at night, I got all kinds of night lights around here that I keep on so she can see where she's going if she gets up to go to the restroom or anything like that.

KV: That's good.

NB: So, I do what I can to make it...it's just one of those things...

KV: Right, that you have to live through.

NB: She said you was on the phone, if I'd have waited much longer I wouldn't have known you called.

KV: Oh really?

NB: It's just...she forgets and she's asking me, "Who was that called? What did they want?" and at no point does it occur to her that she was on the phone...

KV: Oh, ok, so don't leave messages with her then.

NB: Don't expect a return. (Laughter)

KV: Yeah, right!

NB: But you'll get a good conversation.

KV: Oh yeah?

NB: But five minutes later, five or ten minutes later she don't know a thing about it.

KV: Hmm, oh boy, that's really quite an illness isn't it?

NB: Who was that? Did so-and-so call me? And she wants to know, she'd like to know, she gets [unintelligible]

KV: She gets what?

NB: She gets [unintelligible] and [unintelligible] mixed up. She can never remember, when we go to Ingles she always asks where we are, what store is this? This is Ingles, where we do our grocery shopping. What? Each time [unintelligible]. Like I said, she doesn't hurt, sleeps good, nothing wrong with her appetite, she doesn't... she's a diabetic, you have to watch what she eats and her favorite pie is butter pecan.

KV: Oh my golly, whoa, and she's a diabetic.

NB: And now, thing about it, she wants, although she's been a diabetic for quite a while now, that's my responsibility that she eat correctly, not hers cause she loves sweets. You put a plate of food there in front of her, now which do you think she's gonna go after first? The butter pecan pie, and you say anything contrary, why? Just like it's something that just started. And, no you can't and the reason is that your sugar. But I try to keep it to where she can cheat sometimes, but if she stayed away from it she could afford to eat a little sweets every once in awhile. But I can't buy sweets and stuff and I have to keep it here, I used to keep candy in the dishes, cut that out.

KV: Yeah, I guess so. Oh my golly, what a challenge.

NB: Well, you know, it's... but the thing about it, I look around, I could always find people that is in just as bad shape as me.

KV: Yep, and some even worse.

NB: Just as bad. You just have to learn to live with it.

KV: Right, well and I think you adapted to earlier conditions, I imagine you're used to telling yourself to learn to live with it.

NB: I have, I don't go out like I once did. I can't, clubs that I was in and what not, but in the first place you've got to have someone that you...other people, when you fix your schedule, you've got to always think about the other person. I couldn't say, like I said to you we could meet at two o'clock today and I had to think, have I promised some one else that time? You see, I might tell you one thing and then I might have a doctor's appointment or something, see I'm now able to drive and all now.

KV: Oh are you? Good.

NB: And nothings wrong with my hands. I can just sit down and I'm sitting down, I'm doing alright, but I don't try...but like she want me to take her out, well I can't [unintelligible] if she fell I couldn't pick her up, I have a hard time getting up myself. So, you've to think about all those things.

KV: Well, ok so what did you do in your social life when you were...and what were you working at here in Asheville after you came home from the army?

NB: I worked at the VA hospital in Oteen.

KV: Oh at the VA! And what were you doing there?

NB: I was a nursing assistant out there.

KV: And at that point where were you and your wife living?

NB: We were living here, see we've been here 25 years.

KV: Here.

NB: And she worked over at Memorial Mission Hospital. And it's a funny thing, when she got ready to retire her supervisor said, we'll get the names of all of her friends and we're gonna have a little farewell party for her. And then they said, her friends? Well we'd better just open the door and say "y'all come" because she knows everybody. So anyway, [unintelligible] she worked in respiratory therapies, she never smoked or anything like that but she'd go and she'd go stop by and get three or four papers and put them on a cart for a treatment and while she was [unintelligible] the treatment [unintelligible] and everybody... she was well liked.

KV: I bet she was.

NB: Yeah! They'd read the paper and she'd [unintelligible] and she would [unintelligible].

KV: And what about you? Where were you?

NB: I joined, I had clubs too.

KV: Like what?

NB: Well I joined one of the oldest clubs that there was, the one that I just got out of, the Carlton Club. And it had a lot of old members, and it was about the oldest club that there was. I was a youngster when they started off and so I ended up [unintelligible] I joined. And they played cards, entertained each night, not each night but whenever their turn come, they met I think, there was about fifteen to twenty members and we would meet every other week at someone's house and at that time the one at whose house we was meeting, they would take the responsibility to entertain. They served a full meal, played cards, socialized, drank high balls and everyone carried themselves in a reliable way and what not. That was the one that I ended up getting out of.

KV: I think I've heard of that one.

NB: It's well known and so I belonged to quite a few. And with both of us being from Asheville we all knew, people that I knew she knew and the people that she knew *I* knew. Like Dave Jones, you probably have heard of him.

KV: Oh sure.

NB: Well he's a Carlton Club member, he's still in there, and Jean Bell.

KV: Oh really?

NB: Yep.

KV: Ok, know him and know his wife. Is James Green in that?

NB: Yeah!

KV: Okay.

NB: Yes, he ran the store.

KV: Yeah, he still does.

NB: But see I took sick, I went in the hospital twice. First time I'd ever been in the hospital and all that. I came down with the gout and it got up and down my side and you're talking about something that is painful, I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy, you're green and all and they are the older guys and they came to see me when I was in the hospital and all.

KV: Where is Lawrence Gilliam?

NB: Lawrence Gillum, yeah I know him too. [Unintelligible] he came by about a couple weeks ago.

KV: Oh did he really?

NB: Um-hum.

KV: Huh, cause he had taken me on a tour and was pointing out some of the street changes since "urban renewal" as it was called, you know, changed so much of the lay out of the East Riverside area and the Riverside/Southside and East End and the area where Hill Street used to be and that was really an informative tour.

NB: Yeah I've known Lawrence about all my life.

KV: Oh, I suppose so, he's younger than you isn't he?

NB: He is, he and my younger sister were classmates in school and then the ones in California, [unintelligible] in church [unintelligible] about two or three years. Before we moved here we lived on Blanton Street and [unintelligible]'s mother lived on Blanton Street and I'd just call and take her [unintelligible] and that went on for quite some time.

KV: Where on Blanton did you live?

NB: 146, I stayed next door to the Harts in the [unintelligible] home, I lived there, that's where my children was raised up. My children they was out of school when I moved here. Cause where we was was a large house and I was just telling my wife, it's just with the two of us it's no need of us living in such a large house so we started looking around to find a house that was smaller and where the upkeep wouldn't be as much and that's how we ended up out here. And so we've been out here 26 years.

KV: Were you going to the basilica after you got married and ...?

NB: Yes, uh-huh, and I went there and I still do go and [unintelligible] get myself together and go and when I went there, when they closed down St. Anthony's, Bishop [unintelligible name] was the pastor and they moved him to the basilica. Did you remember him?

KV: No.

NB: You never did know him?

KV: No

NB: No, well anyway he came by cause he was in town, I wanna say about three weeks ago and [unintelligible] Gillum brought him by to see me.

KV: Oh, how nice.

NB: And Bishop, Hazel Bishop (?), he's a little older than I am and he doesn't get around too much but he says [unintelligible] was one of his favorites and he went around, came here and just saw...

KV: So had the church been an important part of your parent's life too?

NB: Yes. My mother, now my father he was a Methodist, but everyone else in the family were Catholics and went to school and everything. And so he just, he went to Brown's Temple on the corner of Phifer and Blanton Street, that's the church that he attended.

KV: Is that gone? Is Brown's Temple gone now?

NB: No they built a new church, it's probably newest as far as churches on that side.

KV: And is it still at the corner of Phifer and Blanton?

NB: Same location, if you see it you'll see, it's very modern. They tore the other one down and built this new one.

KV: Oh, oh they did?

NB: And my father's name, he's one of the deacons, is cut into stones, you know?

KV: Oh really? He looks like a cheerful man, I mean in this picture, he's got a great smile.

NB: He was.....I was looking to see if I had a picture of my wife. These are my children, not *my* children, those are my *grandchildren*, all three of them. And the girl, she's the oldest, that's my oldest daughter here and [unintelligible] adopted her. And the boy on the right, on your right, that's my grandson and his birthday is February 17 the same as my father's. And the other one, my other daughter's son, Nicholas and he's in the ninth grade in school, that's them. And that's my daughter that got married and Nicholas [unintelligible] that's his mother right there.

KV: Oh really?

NB: Um-hum.

KV: How important do you think the...when you were growing up can you think of any important institutions or practices in your neighborhood that helped you all be strong and...?

NB: That helped us to be strong....? I'd say hard work.

KV: Hard work?

NB: Yes. I thrived on work and I tried to set an example cause I'll tell you what has happened, I says, I told my kids, "If you get out and take a job [unintelligible]" I said "You get out there and work and make your own money and purchase what you want and no one can deny you of it."

KV: And yet Willie May Brown (?) said "Hard work never hurt anybody."

NB: No, like what I was telling you if you go out and work for something, no one... and that was my mother's, my mother taught us, you work and no one can deny you, it's yours. And I always remembered that. And one other thing she said I always remembered and my father always says [completely unintelligible] if they are old enough to work and make the money then they are old enough to spend it wisely. I says I hope they don't throw it away but they know how hard they had to work for it, so they'll spend it that way.

KV: So do you think that there was any much difference then between that ethic and what you see in young people now a days?

NB: Well I think the children are given too much, life is made too easy for them because when I was coming along they didn't have AB-Tech where you could go and take a trade course. My two brothers told me when they went off to school, people would

write letters then, wasn't no...wasn't no computers and I would send them a letter with five dollars in it, gosh and that was [unintelligible] get your hair cut, your clothes cleaned

KV: That would be...

NB: You could do so much with it, but now, you hand a child five dollars

[unintelligible] he asks you where's the rest of it and then he may not tell you thank you for that, it just goes to show you how time has changed but the children was more appreciative then than they are now. And I found out not only in my...that's over all in general, you'll find that. You work for it and it's yours and above all take care of what you have, don't do anything else.

KV: I kinda wonder how the economy now...if it's having any effect on teenagers, if it's sunk in that it's gonna be harder to get money...?

NB: I think it's gonna sink in, it will, it might not have gotten to all of them yet but...now one thing about my son, he don't [unintelligible] a car for twenty years cause there's nothing wrong with it, and he keeps it, but there's another person trade cars every two or three years [unintelligible] at the end of that, just another car.

KV: A newer car, that's all.

NB: But, uh, you have to take care of what you got and so that's the person that I admire, someone who takes care of what they have.

KV: Oh yes, and my husband is one of those who holds onto cars for years and years and does repair on them and things like that. Are these booklets over here...the Reader's Digest America, oh that's just...?

NB: It's just a calendar.

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KV: What was going on with so called urban renewal...?

NB: Not, I didn't really [unintelligible] I remember what it was [unintelligible] I didn't get too involved in it because I, you know, I just didn't you know, I was working and I was busy getting my children, getting my children situated. I always remember when we was, I remember telling my wife, I said when we...well I says, "Everything is integrated now," I said, "We can go back to school."

KV: That's true.

NB: We can go, I said, *but*, [unintelligible] pretty good set up, [unintelligible] early.

KV: Yep and you would have decent benefits too, especially with the VA.

NB: Since that's happened, I think maybe we should just put our time in with the children and we'll make do right as we are, I said and so I told my oldest daughter, I said, you could go to the school that you [unintelligible] I said I'm not gonna [unintelligible], you're gonna have to get that out for yourself, and so she [unintelligible]. She picked a private school.

KV: Oh she did?

NB: [unintelligible] saved up for the four years, went for one year...(laughter)

KV: One year, yeah!

NB: But I told her, you're gonna have to go to a state school, but I said and I don't regret it, that I didn't attempt to [unintelligible] I put it on them and so they was all able to go to college and they was all able to go and it has paid off, I mean my daughter said, when they was laying off down in Charlotte, laying off the teachers, she said, what would

we have done if Dad hadn't sent us to...you know....said, they're threatening to lay us off now, as is, but they didn't, *but* she says if we didn't a teacher's certificate we'd be gone. [unintelligible] they sent my daughter a [unintelligible] but she's, that's the oldest one, she's been with the system 19 years, but she wasn't a teacher. They had her classified as a teacher, but she was a social worker. She got her masters at the University of Tennessee. They got the lawyer talked, they got together and they said she couldn't be used, she wouldn't be in that category, so she was able to maintain her job and she had 19 years and they was getting ready to let her go, so they said. And my other daughter, she's still teaching, she's down in the Mecklenburg system.

KV: Oh she is?

NB: She's not...

KV: She's not!

NB: She's in [unintelligible] one of those other...

KV: Oh, but it's around Charlotte?

NB: Yeah, right around Charlotte. She's still...you know, they didn't bother her. She's still teaching. In fact, I don't think they laid off...they didn't hire any, that's for sure. So my son, he's the only one that...he's still working and my son he's maintaining his job.

And so so far I'm glad that they all went on through and furthered their education...

KV: And that you were able to help them do it...

NB: Help them, in other words, my doing without [unintelligible] working now [unintelligible] if I could, but they can and so...I discovered years ago that I wasn't gonna be rich, and so...

KV: Oh yeah right!

NB: So if there's anything that you wanna...you can call and talk to me about...

TAPE SHUT OFF.

KV: Oh really?

NB: She's married to my brother [unintelligible] to have Thanksgiving.

KV: Oh nice!

NB: Um-hum.

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KV: Tell me more about your brothers... I can't remember the one from D.C., his name...?

NB: His name is Raymond Bowman.

KV: Is he the...where in the...

NB: I am the oldest and he is the youngest of the boys.

KV: Of the boys!?

NB: Yeah.

KV: And the one that's here in Asheville... what's his name?

NB: Richard.

KV: And you said "of the boys" so there must some sisters.

NB: I have a sister that is younger and she lives in California.

KV: And her name?

NB: Gloria. Gloria Lee.

KV: And Lee is her married name?

NB: Yes.

KV: [unintelligible]

NB: [unintelligible]

KV: Oh yeah, that'll help...and she's in CA you said?

NB: Yes.

KV: Your wife's name?

NB: Jeanne. J E A N N E. Jeanne Walker Bowman.

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NB: ... [unintelligible] wedding anniversary.

KV: Oh!

NB: [unintelligible]

KV: Oh, a party!?!...celebration, yeah!

NB: That's ahh...

KV: Wow, she looks like a kid! She looks young... and what church was this at?

NB: That was at Saint Agnes (?) where we got married [unintelligible] but it closed.

KV: Yes, I'm aware of that.

NB: And this is [unintelligible] in the back. That's the same picture but 50 years difference.

KV: Yeah, fifty years makes quite a bit of difference alright, I noticed that. It doesn't even take fifty years for the difference. Wow, that must have been fun. So that was in 2003 that you had the fiftieth anniversary party?

NB: Yes.

KV: And your children put it together for you? ...oh how nice!

NB: It was a surprise.

KV: So...married 1953. How did you meet?

NB: Well, I had known her, cause we lived in the same neighborhood.

KV: And which neighborhood was that?

NB: That was...she lived on Walton Street and that was right there near the church and I lived on Palmer Street which was right off Depot Street.

KV: Oh, ok...I'm aware of the---

NB: I was right off Depot Street.

KV: Did you both go to Saint Anthony's?

NB: I did, she didn't ...so, the way we met really, was the fact that I had been in the military and I was discharged in December, December around the 20<sup>th</sup>, around in the teens, it was the early part of December.

KV: Ok, what year?

NB: '53

KV: '53? Ok!

NB: And so in coming back home I was looking to meet, I wanted to get reacquainted with my friends. And I was just out and it was a [unintelligible] had every year, called the Black and White Ball. And it was invitation only and I wanted an invitation

[unintelligible] and I ran up, I ran into her.... [unintelligible].... oh, ok...right there, her...they were real good friends [unintelligible] and I was telling them how, they asked where was I going and I said I was going to see if I could get an invitation to a dance and they said, well you don't need one. She says *she* has an invitation, well see [unintelligible] in order for me to get to the dance, she had the invitation and I had no invitation and so I said well, I'll stop looking then. And so then we talked and what not and they...so uh, and I got the invitation and we went on to the dance and she introduced me to a lot of people that I hadn't seen...in quite awhile, because I'd been in the military and they said, well, you are bring him over and vice versa, you know, just enjoying conversation and we're both from Asheville, we're both in the same neighborhood [unintelligible] and all along she was pushing it and everywhere I'd go she'd make sure she was there too.

KV: Oh really!? And what's her name?

NB: Sheila Jackson but she's...she's not living, she...she expired. [unintelligible] she's expired, she's expired, he's expired.

KV: Hmm, what's his name?

NB: He was John McClellan. He lived on Walton Street, right across the street from the church.

KV: Oh yeah?

NB: And so that's my brother Richard [unintelligible]

KV: It's interesting. So she was quite an influential person in your life in the end, indirectly...

NB: Sometimes I [unintelligible] kidding, you know.

KV: Yeah, right.

NB: But it also [unintelligible] she helped give a history of, she was on the profile...this is...

KV: That's the program huh?

NB: Uh-huh, they tried to keep it a secret, course [unintelligible] my wife, they let out a... I had a feeling. It was real nice.

KV: I bet so.

NB: And so...

KV: How many children do you have?

NB: I have---

KV: We were working on that...

NB: I have four children.

KV: Four...starting from oldest to youngest, can we...

NB: That's the oldest.

KV: Theresa?

NB: Theresa is the oldest.

KV: And when was she born?

NB: January the 6<sup>th</sup>, nineteen fifty...three, I think it was. I think, wait a minute...fifty four maybe. She's never been married, she adopted a child.

KV: Oh did she really?

NB: Um-hmm and her name is Taylor (?). And this is Nathaniel, I'll give you the age down the line.

KV: Ok.

NB: Nathaniel Edward. My father's name was Nathaniel and *her* father, his name was Edward, so we named him Nathaniel Edward Bowman.

KV: And where is he living now?

NB: He stays here. He is the only one who is here at Asheville and he moved back in cause my wife and I had reached a point where he felt that we shouldn't be alone in the house. He has a home over in town but he chose to move back over here. He's at work now and he should be getting off, he gets off about this time. He will probably be getting home around three.

KV: Does he stop over and check on you everyday?

NB: No he has a room now. It's just my wife and I and he has a room, of course he still maintains his home. His home is still over in Asheville.

KV: No kidding?

NB: Yes, but see my wife, she has personality changes and then I was in the hospital myself and how he did it I don't know, but taking care of her and working. He's a very calm person, never gets excited about anything---

KV: Wonderful

NB: And he is outstanding, he is really [unintelligible]. Maybe he'll come in before you leave.

KV: Oh, that'd be nice. How old would you put him at?

NB: How old?

KV: Or can you remember roughly when he was born?

NB: I've got the dates, I just don't know the age. He was born April the 8<sup>th</sup>, and he's turning about 54 now.

KV: Ok, so...if he's 54 now, then fifty nine, no...

NB: Now Theresa the oldest one, she's got a birthday coming up in January, so...

KV: So Nathaniel must have been born about fifty, nineteen fifty...eight?

NB: No.

KV: Earlier than that?

NB: No, let's see, this is his...

KV: Never mind, it's not that important, I'll meet him. So we've got Theresa and Nathaniel and...

NB: Mary comes next.

KV: And now she's a Robinson?

NB: Yes. She was born June the 10<sup>th</sup>, '57.

KV: June the 10<sup>th</sup>?

NB: Yes. She has a son, Nicholas Robinson.

KV: Hmm, ok, Mary does.

NB: Uh-huh and a husband John Robinson.

KV: And where do they live?

NB: They live in Charlotte too.

KV: Oh they do.

NB: Have you got others in Charlotte? That's all in Charlotte. [unintelligible]...

KV: Penelope?

NB: Gregory.

KV: Oh, Gregory.

NB: Gregory Bowman and that's the rotation of the age, there's four children, two boys, two girls... You probably need that more than I do... now here's [unintelligible] wife...

KV: And where do they live?

NB: Greensboro. And they have one son.

KV: So, you grew up on Palmer?

NB: On Palmer Street.

KV: And how long? Was pretty much your whole childhood spent there?

NB: Yes it was. I was born on Buttrick Street.

KV: How do you spell that?

NB: (Laughter) It's not a street anymore.

KV: Oh it's one of those that got erased during the...

NB: During the expressway.

KV: Ooh!

NB: Yeah, cause that expressway runs over that property where I was born.

KV: But how do you spell it, cause I've got some old maps.

NB: Buttrick...B...I really don't...

KV: B U T T R I C K?

NB: I really don't know, one thing... we moved from there when I was very young, I hadn't even started to school and [unintelligible] about it, I don't know the number of the house, but I do know it was Buttrick Street and I tell you, if you go straight up Clingman Avenue, cross Patton Avenue and you'll see a church up there, that church is on the

corner of Buttrick and whatnot. And you go right on down that street, that's where the expressway is.

KV: Oh yeah?

NB: You know where that is? You follow me now? And the expressway is there and so it just wiped off everything...

KV: Is that what made your parents move?

NB: They just had the expressway way ran through there...

KV: Yeah cause that was much later...

NB: Yeah, much later. But like I said, I knew nothing, I hadn't even started to school, so I didn't know too much about it and I think times was pretty tight everywhere.

KV: Probably so. Cause this would have been...your birth date again...?

NB: Well I was born in 1925 and that was about in 1927 I would say.

KV: Oh, so you would have been about two.

NB: Something like that.

KV: And when in 1925, what month and day?

NB: Ahh, that I was born...that was the 4<sup>th</sup> month, that's April and the 30<sup>th</sup> is the date.

KV: Oh really?

NB: Um-hmm.

KV: Mine is the 28<sup>th</sup> of April.

NB: Is that right?

KV: So you're a Taurus too.

NB: Uh-huh.

KV: Ok, so, how far back can you remember then...after you'd moved to Palmer?

NB: Yes, I remember Palmer Street.

KV: What can you remember about that?

NB: Just about everything cause that's where I was raised up and I started to school in the first grade.

KV: At St. Anthony's...

NB: No

KV: Oh, no St. Anthony's wouldn't have been built then would it?

NB: Livingston Street School.

KV: Livingston Street School, ok.

NB: Livingston...Street...School.

KV: And it's the one that is now Reed Center, isn't it?

NB: The Reed Center. And my first grade teacher was Miss James.

KV: It's wonderful how we can remember things like that isn't it?

NB: Yes, there was my first day in school...

KV: And what can you remember about you in first grade? Can you remember anything from that?

NB: When I remember the first grade I just think about the advantages that students have now and that [unintelligible] we didn't have. We didn't have kindergartens, we didn't have anything. When you went to school your first grade teacher had to teach you how to write your name and all that stuff, start from scratch. Nowadays they've got preschool and all that stuff.

KV: Kids know how to write before they even hit kindergarten, in some cases.

NB: Yeah! And so I just say they, well I'm sure they appreciate it, but if it would have come along a little earlier I would say they would appreciate it a little more. And I said [unintelligible] was the [unintelligible] and Miss James was my first grade teacher and of course she taught me everything, she taught me to write N A T, for awhile it was just N A T and well she taught me how to write my name, that was Miss James. Like I said they had to teach you everything because you [unintelligible]. My mother, we had [unintelligible] in the family and she could only spend so much time with me and so...but other than that, uh...I went to Livingston and well in '36, in 1936 that's when the Catholic schools opened up and my mother brought me, transferred me there. One reason, it was closer to home.

KV: It would be, by quite a bit.

NB: Closer to home it was and that meant [unintelligible] and so that's where I stayed until I went to high school.

KV: 1936 is yeah when St. Anthony's opened huh?

NB: Um-hmm.

KV: Then you stayed there until you went to Stevens Lee.

NB: That's correct.

KV: What can you, can you remember any other teachers that you had at...or any of the teachers that you had at St. Anthony's? They were nuns.

NB: I can remember all of them.

KV: Oh can you really?

NB: Well, Sister DePaul, to tell you the truth one teacher taught two classes.

KV: Oh right, yes, I remember hearing about that.

NB: So that made...and when I went in I was in the fifth grade, so I didn't stay there too very long.

KV: No, three years, I guess, right?

NB: Yes.

KV: You started fifth grade there?

NB: Ok. And so I didn't have *too many* different teachers.

KV: Oh right because you would have had her for what fifth and sixth---

NB: Two years. I said two years, fifth and sixth grade. And then we had...

KV: For seventh and eighth...

NB: Sister Pacificus.

KV: Sister Pacificus, alright, and that's spelled basically the way it sounds?

NB: Yes.

KV: Ok good. And so from eighth grade then you went to...and can you tell us about how they dealt with the two classes in one room.

NB: That...I'll tell you, I left, I came back to [unintelligible] I thought it was huge, I thought the room was [unintelligible], but when I came back and looked over the rooms they seemed so small. And how they... they would just sit one side and have them working on one object while she teaches on another. How she did it and at that age, I just didn't...

KV: And the kids were cooperative then?

NB: They were...they, when you learned, when you know how things work and you do it everyday it come natural. I didn't think anything about it and she's give us work to do, arithmetic as they called it and we were working on that, trying to get...had to be

finished at a certain time and they were working on something else, she's teaching them something and it was real...they had it together.

KV: Sounds like it and I'd heard that the kids from St. Anthony's were well prepared for high school.

NB: Well, we fell right in and yes we fell...and the tuition, it was a private school, but when we started out the tuition was 15 cents a week.

KV: Oh really? That's how they did it? Cause that doesn't sound so bad.

NB: Fifteen cents, that's sixty cents a month. But that was a lot of money.

KV: Yeah, it would have been.

NB: Then.

KV: And what did you do for fun? Was there a recreation, a gym class or recess or...?

NB: We had recess, we got [unintelligible] back then [unintelligible]. One side was for the girls and one side was for the boys. And uh, that's where we played at recess. That was recess.

KV: What did your dad do?

NB: What did who?

KV: Your *father*?

NB: Oh my father worked at a furniture store and uh...the name of the furniture store was Sterchi's.

KV: Sterchi?

NB: Sterchi Brothers.

KV: S T...how do you spell it?

NB: S T E R C H I.

KV: Oh!

NB: They came out of Knoxville, Tennessee, a company, it was brothers and all that. Well, he worked on the floor, moved the furniture around. He was just a jack of all trades, and they needed a truck driver, ran short a truck driver, he fell in there too and what not and so he stayed there for a number of years and he left there, he left Sterchi's and worked at Ray Auto Supply, do you remember that? And he did you know little jobs.

KV: Where was the furniture store?

NB: On Biltmore Avenue, 52 Biltmore Avenue and the building still stands, four story building right across from the parking lot just above the hot dog stand.

KV: Oh really?

NB: Uh-huh. See there's an empty lot cross from it now, but Sterchi's was right there, see there's a street runs right down beside that. I tell you, Roger's Plumbing Company moved into the building after Sterchi's pulled out. And yeah my father worked there and his [unintelligible] he would fix phonograph or uh...record players I guess you call them, the kind where you put records in there and you wind it up, you've seen that kind?

KV: Oh yeah, I remember those.

NB: Well, he repaired them and made a little extra money there.

KV: I had a grandmother who had one of those.

NB: Um-hmm.

KV: And that was one of the reasons I liked visiting, was being able to wind that thing up and play those records.

NB: That was [unintelligible] whenever he left Sterchi's, started working at Ray Auto Supply, he worked down there and Ray had about five or six apartment buildings that he

had rented out and my father would go and take care of them for him, then he'd go on to his regular job at Sterchi's. Well, that's a lot of work.

KV: It would be.

NB: That's where I came in, I would go get up and go and leave home around 6 or 6:30 in the morning, [unintelligible] that old car and my job was to fill the stokers up with coal.

KV: Oh really?

NB: Um-hmm, and I'm working for him, I'm working for my father and so you can probably imagine how much pay I got. (Laughter)

KV: Probably not much, did you get any?

NB: Lunch money, I got a dime, five cents for an RC Cola and five cents for a pack of [unintelligible] that was for my lunch and that would be it. But he promised, when I get straight I'm gonna fix you up. (Laughter)

KV: Oh did he?

NB: He said that, but times were tough and I had my [unintelligible] just getting out of bed wasn't the best.

KV: Right, that'd be hard to do, especially when you're a teenager it gets harder when the teen years hit.

NB: Yeah.

KV: Did you have any time for play, in the neighborhood?

NB: Well see that stoker, filling that stoker up, that came about in the mornings, now when night time come, he got off from his job and he wandered around and he

checked...you know he was making his night rounds, well he...in other words, he's on his way home, well he has time to fill the stokers up himself and so I had a little time...

KV: After school...

NB: Course I'd wash windows, I had to get some money, see [unintelligible] and so and...

KV: So you earned money by washing windows?

NB: Oh yeah, I'd cut grass, rake leaves...and they paid me an average of 15 cents an hour.

KV: Oh did they really?

NB: Um-hmm, that'd be on Saturdays.

KV: So did you work most of the Saturday?

NB: Well, not all, I had people that I worked for and they knew me and everything, out in Kennelworth, right down in Kennelworth. Yes, I washed a lot of windows, raked a lot of leaves...

KV: And how did you get there from where you lived?

NB: On foot, cause bus fare was 6 cents, that's money in my pocket.

KV: Yeah, that would be.

NB: I wasn't gonna give *my* money to the bus, I used my feet, cause no one had cars then and them that had cars they wouldn't have room. My father had a car and we'd never know whether or not the car would start when we got up in the morning or not.

KV: You didn't know? Oh geez.

NB: Didn't know... (Laughter)... We had to push it off sometimes, most of the time, so we had to park it on a hill. Well they had clutches then and you'd just raise your foot

up off the clutch and it'd pick up and go from there. And they didn't have heaters in cars then, so you left the windows up and [unintelligible] and yeah...

KV: Did you have time for any extra curricular activities at Stevens Lee?

NB: No, I didn't, not like I wanted to. I wanted to join the band, but I didn't have an instrument. I never could get an instrument.

KV: That's too bad.

NB: And the thing about it, they had an instrument there and the band director promised it to me, but he was promising it to everybody that would come asking. So I told everybody that I was getting in the band, but as it turns out I didn't.

KV: Because he promised it to somebody else.

NB: Yeah, well it went to whoever got there first when it came in.

KV: Oh no kidding!

NB: But he wasn't a bad type of person, he was just, well you know, you've got so many students and everybody always be asking you and he just...you know, and he was very likable. He wasn't bad, but the guy that he gave the instrument to was just there at the right time.

KV: And what was the instrument?

NB: It was a trombone. And I didn't want a trombone but you had to take what you could get.

KV: Wow that would take a little bit of practice though.

NB: Yeah, the trombone...I wanted the saxophone, a saxophone was a much easier instrument to play than a trombone. But that was a great lesson to me, *I* when I got out of there I said, [unintelligible] my brother that's here, he played in the band, he played the

clarinet, the reason why he played the clarinet [unintelligible] disappointed like I was, I'm gonna buy him a clarinet and so I did. I went to New York, and New York a big city, they had these here pawn shops and everything they had was much [unintelligible] than what we had here in our little pawn shops, well they had a whole lot of used secondhand instruments and all that for sale. And he said he wanted to play the clarinet and I laid it away and that's what I got him was a clarinet. And now he left and now he plays in the community band now and they're gonna be playing for the Christmas [unintelligible] it is retired people.

KV: Oh really?

NB: Um-hmm. And so he still has his clarinet and so, I said rather than to be outdone, and I thought the instrument they had such a nice variety and my brother he wanted to play the saxophone, my younger brother, well that's what I wanted myself, so I went over and got him a used saxophone so when he got in high school he was in the band.

KV: Oh how nice boy that was--- talk about taking a lemon and turning it into lemonade.

NB: Well that was it. And I'll never forget, my mother told me once, this was after I had gotten out of high school and went up to New York, and she said that the boys wants a bike, said they want a bicycle. And I said, well I'll see what I can do. And I got one bike and they used the one bike between the two of them.

KV: Oh really?

NB: And they was glad, they didn't think a thing about it. And I'm glad I was able to do it, cause you know... I went on then and ...I'll show you my mother and my father's picture.

KV: Oh sure!

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NB: Now that's my mother and that's my father.

KV: [unintelligible] I can see the resemblance between you and your father...and this picture over here, is this your mother and father in younger years? Or...?

NB: That's my wife and that's my brother Richard and this is my sister Edna, she is between Bridget and I, she died about two years ago.

KV: Oh she did? Edna...and you say she was between you and Richard?

NB: Yes, yes between...

KV: Did she stay a Bowman?

NB: No, she married and has three children. She has three children, two lives in Washington D.C. and one is in California. [unintelligible]

KV: And what was her married name?

NB: Prudhumme, Edna Bowman Prudhumme. P R U D H U M M E.

KV: Sounds French.

TAPE SHUT OFF

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KV: ...the sun never really came out today did it?...um, so your dad was a hard working man...

NB: Yes, but people didn't really get much for that.

KV: Right, right, right...for their work.

NB: Cause they wanted him to teach how to repair phonograph stuff, record players and he refused because he knew that after they learnt he wouldn't get the jobs. So he just went on and [unintelligible] permanent job.

KV: So how did you end up in New York?

NB: My mother's sister. She had a sister there and I had just gotten out of high school and I had never ridden a train, so that tells you I hadn't been too far out of Asheville. I heard about people leaving town and going to big cities like Chicago, New York, Philadelphia and they'd come back and oh!!! And I said I wish I could go places and my mom's sister said come on, see it was war time and there was plenty of jobs and she told me what they were making in salary and I thought that was just outstanding, make that much money?! Now it wouldn't be a drop in the bucket...but I went back with her and that's when I start getting a job and I bought me some clothes and what not and...

KV: And you had money left over to go to the pawn shop and buy a clarinet and...

NB: I laid it away, yeah, I'm coming home and I wanna have something to show.

KV: Oh yeah, um-hmm.

NB: I know how it is. [unintelligible] I even gave my mother a trip to Boston, Massachusetts. When I went to the pawn shop then she got on me (laughter) to get some money (laughter).

KV: Boy, wow, that must have been something for your mother.

NB: [unintelligible] went by train.

KV: Yeah, yeah, that would make sense, cause you had the train station here.

NB: Yeah, and I...have you ever seen the train station?

KV: No, it was torn down by the time we moved here.

NB: [unintelligible] saw a picture of it. I'll find it, it's in here. And I lived about two or three blocks from the train station. Let's see, I'll tell you, I don't know exactly which page it's on, I'll find it...

KV: Oh there's the YMI.

NB: Yeah, that's it...yeah, I could see the train station from my house...I just don't know what...now let me go back...

KV: What's this from?

NB: That's uhh...

KV: It says May 2009.

NB: Yes, I [unintelligible] that out cause I...

KV: Cause we were getting the Asheville Citizen...and this was in the newspaper...

NB: Yes, it was a sketch...I just put it up and I thought about it...I'm gonna see, it's in here, that train station...

KV: It's a shame it got torn down, what's this one?

NB: [unintelligible]

KV: Oh that's the YMI, yeah.

TAPE SHUT OFF

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NB: Oh there it is, there's the train station.

KV: Oh! Oh they were taking refuge down there during the flood of 1916, wow. Oh and there are the trolleys.

NB: Yep, this is interesting...

KV: Looks like it...oh, the cities first black baseball team, 1916 at Pearson Park in West Asheville. This is a nice, a useful...I'm gonna have to see if my husband spotted that...was this maybe in a Sunday paper?

NB: It was in a Sundays paper, 'bout a year ago.

KV: Or less I guess, cause it says 2009 there. So you went with your aunt to New York City and what kind of work were you able to get?

NB: I worked at a factory, making buckles and then I saved a little money and I went to barbering school, to be a barber---

KV: Oh you did?

NB: But I never got around to barbering cause they called me into the service---

KV: Ohhh...and this would have been in what...1950? Or when?

NB: It was before then---

KV: '49

NB: The late forties, that would have been the late forties.

KV: But your first job was in this buckle factory in New York?

NB: Yes.

KV: Do you remember the name of it?

NB: ...ohhh, you're taking me back...let me see...Leven and Rosenberg.

KV: Leven and Rosenberg. And you worked and you said you also went to barbering school while you were there...

NB: At night, yeah.

KV: But you didn't actually make money as a barber?

NB: No.

KV: And then you got inducted into the...

NB: Army.

KV: Ok. And when did you graduate from Lee? From Stevens Lee?

NB: '43.

KV: '43...so how long were you working in New York City then before you got inducted?

NB: About five years.

KV: About five years, so that would have been 1948.

NB: Yeah, around then.

KV: And where were you stationed?

NB: Where was I stationed?

KV: Um-hmm.

NB: I was stationed down in Louisiana.

KV: Oh really?

NB: Yeah, that's where I was the longest. Fort [unintelligible].

KV: Fort...

NB: Pork.

KV: P O R K?

NB: Like pork meat.

KV: Yeah, ok.

NB: And that camp is near Alexandria, Louisiana, that's about the closest largest of the small cities in Louisiana.

KV: Oh is it?

NB: Yeah, Louisiana's got New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Shreveport, those are the three largest cities and of course they've got Lake Charles and Alexandria with Camp Pork. Camp Pork is on one side and Lake Charles is on the other side and the camp is as large as one of the towns, it's sitting right in there. They had a South Camp and a North Camp and the blacks, we was in South Camp and the whites was in the North Camp.

KV: Oh really?

NB: Yes.

KV: Hmm.

NB: And of course before I came out [unintelligible]

