

Interviewee: Freeland O. Pendleton, Sr.

Interviewer: Laura Wickstead

Transcriber: Andrew Sterling

LW: Where and when were you born Mr. Pendleton?

FP: I was born in Superior, West Virginia, September 30, 1919.

LW: How long have you lived in Gainsboro?

FP: We moved to Roanoke in 1923 and I lived here most all of my life 'til I got married and bought a home in North/Northwest.

LW: Where did you live when you moved here in the early days?

FP: Right back here at the Civic Center. Our property was right there on the corner, it was up there on the hill from the Civic Center. It was called Diamond Hill. In fact, it was nicknamed Diamond Hill but it was really named Clayton Avenue. We sat up on the hill and looked right down on – Of course, the highway wasn't through there then. It was Hart Avenue. It was the third road up by there. You would sit up on the hill and look down into the graveyard. You know where the graveyard is right down here. We lived right there on that corner.

LW: Where did the "Diamond Hill" nickname come from?

FP: Diamond hill came from at night, you could stand and look up on the hill and see rocks glittering. It looked like diamonds. So they started calling it Diamond hill.

LW: Tell me about your parents and your brothers and sisters.

FP: Well, my mother was born in Superior, not Superior, she was born in Providence, Rhode Island. Her mother died in childbirth and one of her mother's sisters got her, in fact, they stole her and moved to Bedford. And they raised her up until she got to 16 years old. She ran off and got married in West Virginia. (laughing) She was 16 and so that's how we began.

LW: Do you know what year that was, when she was 16?

FP: It was way before my time. (laughing) I really don't remember when she was born. I mean, I got it in the history at home or something like that but, right off hand, I don't know.

LW: Tell me about your brothers and sisters.

FP: My oldest son is named Freeland Jr. He was in banking here in Roanoke for 20 years.

LW: Let me interrupt you, tell me one thing. We forgot to talk about your dad and I want to know about your brothers and sisters not your children.

FP: Oh, my brothers -

LW: First, tell us about your father.

FP: My father was named Henry Pendleton. He was from Lynchburg and he moved to West Virginia and worked in the mines. He got killed in the mines in 1923 and my mother – There was 5 of us kids. After he got killed, we moved to Bedford for about 6 months and then we came to Roanoke. My mother bought a house here in Roanoke. My brother, y'all may have seen it in the paper, his name is Bernard Pendleton. He was Chief of Staff at the Veteran's Administration in Bedford, Massachusetts, 33 years. After he retired, he went to – He finished Hampton and then he got his doctorate at Boston University and when he retired, he came back to Virginia Beach and was Assistant Dean at Norfolk State College. He died some years ago. I had a sister that lived in Philadelphia. She died. And there was a twin, Morris. My sister and brother under me were twins. So after they died – That was about it for my family. In fact, I am the only one living in my immediate family. After my mother was stolen from Providence, her daddy worked for Standard Oil Company in Orange, New Jersey, and he didn't know where she was. And she said, after we were born, we were living right down here on Clayton Avenue, right up where the Civic Center is now. She said, "I'm want to find my father". So she got somebody to look after us. We were teenage and small. I think she was 36 years old. She got in touch with some of her people in Rhode Island and they said that he was – Her father was living somewhere

in New Jersey, Orange, New Jersey. So, she went to New York to visit one of my cousins. She said, "Yeah, I know where he is". So she called him and told him to come over and that she had a surprise for him. He came over and she introduced - My cousin introduced my mother to her father and didn't tell him who she was. He said, "Where is my surprise?". She said, "That's your daughter sitting beside of you". And he was so enthused over it, he couldn't speak for 15 minutes. He had never seen her. She was 6 weeks old when she left, I mean, when they stole her and carried her to Bedford. And he never knew where she was up until she was 36 years old. That was my grandfather. He came to Roanoke to visit us. We were living up on Diamond hill then, right up where the Civic Center there. I guess we went on from there. After my kids were born - In fact, I was married once before. I was married to a girl named Louise Brown. We only were married - we were youngsters - We were only married 9 months. (laughing) And after we separated - I went in the service after that. After that, I volunteered for the Navy. So I went in the service during the war. After I went in the service, she wanted to get a divorce. My first wife wanted to get a divorce so they told her, she didn't have no grounds to get a divorce on. They said, "Your husband can get a divorce". So the lawyer told me, he said - she runned it in the paper for 2 weeks and if I didn't correspond to it - I was in the service then - said she would, they would automatically give her a divorce. So she did. She did that. I didn't correspond, check on it, so the Chaplain came in and called me in. And the thing that tickled me, he said, "The reason I called you in, I've got these divorce papers here. In the eyes of the law, you're a free man but in the eyes of God, you're still married". (laughing) That's what the Chaplain told me. So afterwards, and after I got out of the service and I came back and I met my second wife, so we've been married 46 years. She died in '93, cancer. She was a nurse at Burrell Hospital and Community. That was all of my family. After my family passed away, then my family came along. My son, my oldest son, my second son. You know my oldest son, Freeland Jr., run the coves (??). (laughing)

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LW: Can we backtrack a little bit and tell me what do you remember about your house, the one on Diamond Hill.

FP: It was a 9-room home. I think when she bought it - Clayton Lemons built it, built those homes up there on the hill. Clayton Lemons, I don't know if you know who he was but he was. In fact, he was an aviator, Clayton Lemons, airplanes and things. He would train people out at Woodrum Airport, Woodrum Field. So she bought the house down there. I don't think - During that time, I think the house was selling for around \$3,000. That was a whole lot of money during that time. (laughing). And we lived there until I got married.

LW: What did your mother do? What was her work?

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FP: She was a homemaker and she worked in service. She worked for Miss Jessie. Do you remember a lawyer Jessie, a lawyer here in Roanoke. She worked for his mother. She was the paymaster for N&W. She was the paymaster for N&W and she worked for Miss Jessie. She took in washing, ironing and stuff like that. I used to deliver the clothes back to 'em and all. (laughing) After that, - When I was 12 years old, we joined the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Presbyterian Church. I'm an elder up there at 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Presbyterian Church. Before then I worked for - I went - The doctors - I worked at the Silk Mill for 20 years and it closed. The doctors - 21 doctors had asked me about - They were building a building out on MacClanahan, The Professional Building. He asked me if I would run it for him. I told him if the price was right I would. (laughing) I told him if the price was right I would run it. And when they announced the closing of the Silk Mill after I had been there 20 years, I went and told him the price was right. I didn't care what it was, it was right. (laughing) So I worked for them for 14 years taking care of The Professional Building for 21 doctors. Then a position came open in the schools for a Foreman. The head Foreman was there but they didn't have in the history of Roanoke never had no black Foreman over all the public schools in Roanoke. 36 public schools during that time. They don't have

that many now. They asked me if I would take that job. In fact, Sonny Thomas – I don't know if you remember. You remember Sonny Thomas? Sonny Thomas and John C. Logan – They came to me and asked me, “How about taking that job?”. I said, “I've got a good job”. I was at the Professional Building then. They said, “We want to put somebody in that position. The government said we can't put another white person in that job.” They said, “We've got to have a negro in that job”. So, I told them, “No.”. I didn't think I wanted it. I had a good job and I was satisfied. And they held the job open for 3 months and Sonny Thomas, he was \_\_\_\_\_ (??) up at my church and so he come and he said, “Pendleton, why don't you take that job. We're trying to get somebody to put in that job who knows what they're doing. We don't want to put somebody in there that don't know what they're doing”. I said, “Well, I'll tell ya. I'll put in my resume.”. So I got Mr. Phillips – Remember the Principal of Addison – Mr. Phillips and Mrs. Phillips, they helped me write my resume and I carried it over and gave it to Dr. Paxton. He was the Superintendent of schools during that time. He told 'em, he said, “Well, if you don't hire him, I'm gonna quit myself.”. (laughing) He knew I had handled men before in the service. I took 250 sailors to Orange, New Jersey, and I was a First Class Petty Officer, and they told me I could pick my own Petty Officer to go help me. They had 200 LSTs tied up in docks in Earl (??), New Jersey and the Stegeldors (??) had struck during the war. They had struck and so they couldn't let civilians go across the picket line but Navy personnel could. So I carried from down Yorktown 250 sailors up there and we got those ships out of dock.

LW: Tell me about – Back to your – the position with the schools, what were your responsibilities?

FP: My responsibilities was I inspected the schools, all the schools once a month. I had to go through them and inspect 'em. In fact, there was the head of operations. His office was down there on 6<sup>th</sup> Street, right across from the fire station during that time. After I went there, I was pretty satisfied. I enjoyed it. I'd come in and go in the office in the morning and get everybody on the job. After I got 'em on the job, then I started going around visiting the schools, see what they needed or see what's going on. My supervisor was from Pennsylvania. He was a real nice guy. He was from Pennsylvania. So, I worked there for 13 years I think it was.

LW: Tell me about your schooling. Where did you go to school?

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FP: I went to Addison. I didn't finish. I went to the 11<sup>th</sup> grade but what happened – Now starting off, I went to elementary school at Harrison. You know up at Harrison. That's where I went to elementary school there and I skipped a grade there. I didn't go to the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. They moved me from the 7<sup>th</sup> – They took the 8<sup>th</sup> grade out I think is what happened and I went from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> at Addison. (laughing) During that time, they didn't go no further than the 11<sup>th</sup> grade then. See, they didn't go no further than the 11<sup>th</sup> grade. So, in later years, they put the 12<sup>th</sup> grade back on. So after that, after I left, after I came out of school, I told my mother I wanted to go to Washington. And she said, “What you want to go to Washington for?”. I said, “I want to go up there”. In fact, the reason I wanted to go to Washington, I tried to join the Army and they told me that they wasn't taking any blacks in the Army here in Roanoke. They said the closest place I could go would be Fort Belvoir up near Washington, D.C. I didn't tell my mother what I was going to do. So she said, “I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give you money enough to get there and not enough to get back”. So she thought I wanted to go just to go on vacation or something. So she game me \$10. I never will forget it. Enough to catch the Greyhound Bus, go to Washington. Got up there, I rented a room on T Street for \$2.50 a week – a room, \$2.50 a week and I think the bus trip was \$2 or \$3 or something like that to Washington, one way. And after I got there, you could buy a job. You could buy jobs then. So I went down to the Unemployment Office and they had 2 jobs that maybe I could've done but they had one job in there for chef/cook and one for expert painter, you know, like to paint room inside. So I didn't know much about cooking then. I said I'll take the painting job. I gave them a dollar – I had paid a dollar and a half for the job. They gave me the address out near the zoo in Washington. People lived out there and the husband worked for the

Interior, Washington, DC for Interior at the White House. So, she looked at me and she said, "You look mighty young to be an expert painter". (laughing) I think I was 14 or 15. She said, "You're mighty young to be an expert painter". (laughing) I said, "I'm an expert painter though". She said, "Where are you from?". I said, "I'm from Virginia". She said, "I like Virginia boys so I'm gonna give you a chance". She said, "If you mess up my wall, I'm gonna have to pay more money (laughing) I got in there and I painted living room, dining room, hall, everything. I done a beautiful job. And she said, "You know, I wouldn't believe that you could do this." It took me a week. My rent was due on this \$2.50 room. It was running out. And so, she said, "I've got a room down here in the basement you could use and you could live here until the fall of the year if you want to and help me around the house and I'll see some of my friends get you a job.". I said, "Well and good.". So I moved over there and I used to help her around the house, do things for her. And then up at 16<sup>th</sup> and Irving, they had this big cafeteria in a big apartment building and she got me a job up there as a bus boy. And I stayed there and worked up to waiter. Had a lot of fellows from Howard University used to come over and wait tables for extra work and help. So, I was the bus boy for some of them for a while and they would always tip me and I kept the tables clean for 'em. Finally, I worked up to waiter. I done that until I came back. I came back to Roanoke in 1938. And they said, "Why you come back here for? Ain't no jobs here.". So I heard they was hiring over at the Silk Mill, 1938. I went over there and the man come out, Mr. Rich, a little short fellow. He came out and when he hired me, he said, "I want you, you, you and you.". There were a bunch of guys standing around out there. They picked me. I was a big strapping – I was big then, you know, but I wasn't old. So I got in there, when I got in there, they asked my age. I told 'em how old I was. They said, "I'm sorry, you're too young. We can't hire you.". So I come on back out. So the next week, they were still hiring, I went back over there about 2 weeks later and they picked me again. And I told 'em I was 18. And they said, "You're too young.". I don't know why they didn't recognize me. Anyway, what happened, they was getting ready to put the railroad through there so the engine could bring big box cars and things in to the plant down there. So, the man that lived the 2<sup>nd</sup> door from me when I lived up on Diamond Hill, he worked there. I asked him, "How old do you have to be to get a job over there?". He said, "You gotta be 21.". So what I did, I went back a week or so later and they picked me again. (laughing) So when I got in there and they asked my age, I told 'em I was 23. (laughing) I was big enough but I wasn't old enough. I told 'em I was 23. So, they hired me. And I worked there until 1940 when you had to register for the Army. That's when they caught up with my age. They said, "You mean to tell me you've been here this long and you're just now 21 years old?". I said, "Yeah, that's right. I'm 21 and nothing y'all can do now". They said, "You know, if anything happened to you, your parents could've sued this company.". I said, "Well, didn't nothing happen and I'm 21.". 0.20.22.1

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LW: What types of things did you do at this plant?

FP: I ran a forklift, unloading cars and things like that. I worked on the railroad over there to help put the tracks in. That was a hard job 'cause I was big enough and all and I learned how to roll. I don't know whether you've seen fellows on the railroad rolling those hammers, spiking down \_\_\_\_\_. I learned how to do all that.

LW: And that was something that you did in teams, several men at a time would do that?

FP: Oh yeah. 'Cause it took for one section of rail, it would 8 people to lift one section of rail to set it in.

LW: How did you coordinate everybody's efforts so that you could work together?

FP: They had one lead man that give you the go-ahead of what to do. It had something like a one of those long rails laying out. I think those thing weigh, I don't know how many – over 2 or 300 pounds a foot. One of those long rails. And they had 2 men up here, 2 here, 2 here, and all the way down the line. Had something like an ice hook that hooks under that rail, 1 man on this side and 1 on that side.

The lead man, he would tell you when to get ready to lift. And everybody would lift at the same time and move the rails up on the logs. Then you had to tamp your logs down to the gravel and logs. I had a real tricky life. After that, I started training for prize fighting. I was still working up there though. I fought at the American Legion. I don't know if y'all remember the American Legion Auditorium when it was here. You remember the American Legion? I fought \_\_\_\_\_ with Jessie Baker. Remember Jessie Baker? (laughing) I turned out to be a right good prize fighter during that time.

LW: So, how old were you then?

FP: Let me see. I had to be around 18. 'Cause see, I put my age up when I got the job at the Silk Mill. And I fought – We used to fight guys out of Richmond and West Virginia, Greensboro. We had this big bout down at the American Legion Auditorium. My sisters and all my friends were there. I was gonna fight this guy from Richmond that night. So John Archie Brown – I don't know whether you remember him or not, he was a trainer. John Archie, he was our trainer. We got up there and he said, “Pendleton, I'll tell ya, this guy, in the first round we'll check and see if he's a slugger or a boxer.”. So when I came back to the corner, my trainer said, “He's a slugger.”. What a slugger means is, he just come in wailing away. Don't you do that, you stay back and box him and try to stay out of his way. I said, “OK.”. I got out there and I was ducking and dodging. This guy was coming at me with everything he could think of and I was aiming to ride the ropes – You can fall back against the rope and slide down out the way. So I was in a crouch when I went back, my head missed the top rope. I went out through the 2<sup>nd</sup> rope down on that cement floor. And when I hit the floor, everything went black. Everything went out. When I come to, they had me back up on the ring, on the edge of the ring, and they put the smelling salts, that was worse than the fall was. (laughing) Put that smelling salts under my nose and I come to. Everything was quiet when I came to and the bell rang for the 3<sup>rd</sup> round. I got back in the ring and I kept shaking my head trying to get my head clear but I couldn't get my head clear. And my trainer didn't have sense enough to throw the towel in and see if I was hurt. So I just turned and laid across the ropes and they called the fight. That was the end of my fighting career. (laughing) I wrestled during that time. I used to sing at amateur night at the Virginia Theater. You remember that? And then I sang at banquets at the old Dumas Hotel.

LW: Did you play an instrument too?

FP: Naw. I had a fellow, James Henrdick (??). He used to play the guitar for me.

LW: What kinds of songs did you sing?

FP: Well, I used to sing a song called – A lot of Western songs I sung during that time. Old Saddle in the Old Corral. And I forget the other songs. Anyway, I won the amateur night program up there.

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LW: What was the prize?

FP: I think it was \$50. And they used to have it every other week at the Strand Theater, right across from High Street Church. Y'all don't remember when they had the High Street Church right there where the N&W building is now. Right there. They had a theater, a big theater was right there.

LW: So were they packed houses? Tell me about the audiences.

FP: Oh yeah. 'Cause you could get in for 10 cents. The movie wasn't but 10 cents. Hot dogs were 5 cents, soda 5. You could go out with 50 cents, boy, you could do a whole lot.

LW: Did you see shows at the Dumas and other performers?

FP: I used to go when Duke Ellington used to come here and Lionel Hampton. I used to get in free. Me and a friend of mine, we used to dress like some of the – back in them times, I don't know whether you remember they had these things called Zoot Suits. I used to put on my Zoot Suit, had a long chain that come down here. (laughing) And we'd go ask the – When the musical guys would come up with the band and things, we'd ask if they wanted us to help them carry 'em in. So we would help and carry 'em in and get in and we got in free. They thought we were with the band. (laughing) Me and a boy called Pie Samuel (??) We got in free. Most of all of the activities down at the Civic Center. It was the

American Legion they called it during that time. Right across from the old N&W station. That's where it was.

LW: Were the audiences all black or were there whites in the audience too?

FP: White was - When Cab Calloway and Jimmy Lawrence and all those bands come here, the negros were down on the floor and the whites were up in the balcony. They were segregated. The whites, they'd come fill the back up just to see the bands and things and see us dance. (laughing)

LW: I was gonna ask.

FP: And see us dance. When a white band would come, if negros wanted to see it, they could go down and sit in the balcony and white people would watch the band and hear the music.

LW: Do you have a favorite that you heard?

FP: My favorite was Duke Ellington. That was my favorite. I don't know whether you remember Duke Ellington. That was my favorite. And Duke Ellington and Lionel Hampton and all those bands. They used to come here all the time.

LW: So where did they stay when they came?

FP: The Dumas Hotel. Right up there at the Dumas.

LW: You said you visited the library when you were a little boy, tell me about that.

FP: Yeah. It wasn't like this. I know they done remodeled this. (laughing) It wasn't nothing like this I tell you that now. And Miss Lee, was down here and her husband was the head of the YMCA, Mr. Lee. And that was up on 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue then. It wasn't over here on Orange Avenue. In later years after I joined the - I don't know if you've heard of the Dukes and Earls. I tell you who's got the place now, we sold it to them after some years. We bought a place out in Kingstown and I tell you who's got it now - They have parties and banquets and different things out there. This guy was a coach at William Byrd - See it advertised every Sunday. Malone's Peake. We used to own that. The club Dukes and Earls, we owned it from 1960 up until we sold it. I was the President of the club for 5 or 6 years up until most of the guys got old.

LW: So it was a membership club?

FP: Membership, yeah.

LW: Did you have entertainment come or it was just a place to get together?

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FP: No, we would get together but we would have entertainment but it would be at the Civic Center - have formal dances and dances and things like that. But the place wasn't big enough to do that but we would have parties and things out there, New Years, Christmas and different stuff like that. It was a social club. But we had, in later years, we had moved it into stock. Everybody had stock in it. And as the members died out, we had to pay them out of the stock. And usually most of the time it was \$4,500 and we couldn't stay after members dying out, things got pretty hectic. So, I decided we were going to sell it. Some of them didn't. So I got enough guys together and we sold it to Malone. Its beautiful. You ought to see it. Its beautiful.

LW: Where is it then?

FP: Out in Kingstown. Right out from Holiday Inn, Airport Holiday Inn. Its about a block or two blocks from Holiday Inn, Malone's Peake. But its really - You see it on sometimes on Sunday be advertised for picnics and all that stuff like that. But its real nice.

LW: Tell me about - You said you - You started to tell me about the military and taking the men up to New Jersey. So you joined which branch of the service?

FP: I volunteered for the Navy. I wanted to into the Army but they wasn't taking any blacks in the Army here in Roanoke so I had to go to Fort Belvoir in Washington. So when I got up there, I went over and they sent me over to a building and they said, "You're not any in trouble are ya?". I mean I wanted to volunteer. They thought maybe I wanted to get into the Army to get away from something. I told 'em, "No, I just wanted to - Some of my friends had joined and I wanted to join.".

LW: And about what year was this?

FP: 1936. In 1936. When the war broke out, I said they're gonna want to draft me in the Army and I'm not going in the Army so I volunteered for the Navy. I was working at the Silk Mill. They told me if I could pass this test. I went down to the post office, "We'll send you to the Seaman Branch". They had opened up the Seaman Branch for – During that time, they didn't have nothing in the Navy but stewards and ship's cook. I said, "I know I can do something better than that.". They opened up the Seaman Branch. Secretary Knox was the Secretary of the Navy during that time and they opened the Seaman Branch up so I passed the test. They sent me to Richmond. I was sworn in in Richmond. I went down on Monday and Wednesday, I was in Chicago, Great Lakes. (laughing) Just that quick. They sent me to Richmond and we got sworn in down there and we got on a train, a bunch of us, and left and went to Chicago. I went through boot camp. I think I was in the 12<sup>th</sup> Company. During that time, you went through the Great Lakes, Illinois up there. And then what they did, they says – They had a service school that you could go to and strike for your rating at Hampton, Hampton Institute and different places you know or you could go in the outgoing unit. So I took the outgoing unit. If you take the outgoing unit, that means you go and work by hand instead of studying in the school with the products. So I was on the mine depot down in Yorktown. A lot of the guys from Chicago, they went in the service school down at Hampton. And when they graduated from Hampton through their course, I was a 3<sup>rd</sup> Class Petty Officer. They said, "How did you get up...?" - And half the guys that went down there, only 25% of the class came out rated in school. I went and struck for my rating. I went and worked with \_\_\_\_\_, mines depot and all that. I was a 3<sup>rd</sup> Class Petty Officer when they came out of school. (laughing) And I was on the base – I don't know whether you remember the base blew up, the whole base blew up down there in Yorktown. And what happened, the Tarpex (??) plant, the stuff that they used in torpedoes. That stuff was dangerous. That place – In fact, I had been out to the USO, I came in and was in the Petty Officer Quarters. We had different quarters than the rest of them, the officers did. I was in there and getting ready to go to bed, and just as I am about to get in the bed, a light blaze went straight up – I was looking out the window, looked like about a mile high in the air. And then that whole peninsula shook. So I thought the Japanese had just struck. (laughing) Somebody had sabotaged it and blew up the place down there. My mother was in Washington. She was looking for me that weekend. She was scared to death thought maybe I had got hurt. Only 5 people got killed. They had civilians working at these plants. They sent all of 'em home that evening for the night shift and told 'em to come back the next morning. It was a good thing they did. They knew that somebody had got in there. 'Cause somebody had knocked – One of the marines on the gate they had knocked him in the head and they had go into the place. But they had all these magazines all out. You could go down to Williamsburg and go down through there, you can look over and see these humps in the ground. That's where they kept the ammuniton, called it magazines, that's what they called it. They kept all this ammuniton stored in these humps. This is right down there now. On the train, you could see it when the train goes through. So, they wouldn't let no Navy personnel go out to the scene. There was a Marine there at night guarding at night. He was about 200 yards from where the explosion was and it busted both his eardrums and twisted his rifle in his hand, like that. And the railroad cars sitting around this building with the doors closed, the concussion just boost the side of the cars out like that. Looks like somebody just pushed 'em out, you know, to the side, And all the automobiles down there, it just sucked the tops right into the seat. We were right on the base there at Yorktown and then Norfolk got a worser shock than we did. The concussion followed the water towards Norfolk. They got it worse. We were right there where it was but they got the worst end of it in Norfolk. They sent a party out the next day, we went down to see. It looked like all the trees around there, looked like somebody just took something to skin 'em. And some of them big railroad car wheels were found a half a mile from the explosion. Lo and behold, at Treasure Island down in California, that same plant, another plant with the same thing blew up. I'm telling you, it was awful that day. And there were 5 guys that

got killed. It was one of 'em from Roanoke. Miss – What was her name? - Her – She was a teacher at Addison. She taught Home Ec at Addison. Her brother got killed. He lived down at Gloucester Point but he worked on the base and 4 other guys. And the only thing they found, they found one head burnt and hand in a glove. That's all they found.

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LW: Let me pull you back to Gainsboro. I want to ask you, when you were young, were there any adults – who were important people in your life that - ?

FP: Well, Mr. Lee was one at the Y.

LW: Did you spend a lot of time at the Y?

FP: Oh yeah.

LW: Is that where your boxing developed?

FP: The boxing developed – John Archie – We used to live right – Let's see, where's the Claytor home, right here, right across there. Well there was a big building. The Y was right across from the Claytors. The drug store was right there on the corner and the Y was right there and we trained upstairs and Mr. Lee, upstairs, that's where we trained at, upstairs on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. He and Mr. Lee and – Who else was it? - Coach Lawson who was a coach at Addison at that time back then 'cause I played football over there at Addison. Let me see. Who else was there? Undertaker Clark, I don't know whether you – years ago, the undertaker used to be right over there on the corner of 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, undertaker Clark.

LW: How did you know him?

FP: Know who?

LW: Mr. Clark.

FP: Well, back in the day, in fact, everybody knew Clark 'cause during that time him and this other undertaker – There wasn't but two black undertakers here in Roanoke then. In fact, he knew everybody just about in Roanoke. Not everybody but all the blacks. He knew all the blacks in Roanoke.

Undertaker Clark. I'm thinking of the other undertaker – Williams up on Gillam Avenue, undertaker Williams. His wife died not too long ago, Mrs. Williams.

LW: Were there certain things that you and your friends after school, you'd go off – Was there something you'd do or someplace you'd go or on weekends? What did you all do as kids?

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FP: We didn't go nowhere on weekends. Not out of town.

LW: But I mean, did you – would you go on hikes or did you ever go camping or did you go to the drugstore - ?

FP: We'd hang out right here on the corner at the drugstore. We used to hang out there. And sometimes on Sunday, we used to go to Berkley's Bottom. A place called Berkley's Bottom down below Vinton. We used to walk down there and there's a creek. We used to go and swim in it. We didn't have no swimming pool, not then. Later years, they got the swimming pool right up here on, right across from the Y. You can see part of it there now, the cement part. Part of the swimming pool was right there. Because there wasn't no road going through there then. Nothing but a dirt road going up through there.

LW: How'd you learn to swim?

FP: In the creek. (laughing) Down at Berkley's Bottom. That's how I learned how to swim. Of course you had to know how to swim to get in the Navy anyway. You had to pass the test. When you went there, they'd tell ya, “Jump in here and swim all the way around and back up and get out.” They said all those who could swim didn't have to take the test and we had some there that had never went in the water in their life and they hauled off and jumped off that thing into the water and the man had to go get 'em. (laughing) He told 'em, “I said, the ones who knew how to swim.” They'd teach you how to jump. You don't dive off of no ship. If your ship get blowed up, you don't dive off no ship, you jump feet first. They teach you to jump feet first. 'Cause you can dive off and hit your head on some of



the debris in the water and drown so you jumped feet first. I caddied. I was 11 years old. That was another thing I did, I caddied out at Old Monterey, 11 years old. That's how I got into golf. I used to make 2 rounds of 18/36 holes on Sunday. I'd get \$2.50 for each 18 holes of golf.

LW: So that was pretty good money.

FP: It was good money for an 11 year-old youngster back then. And then the guys would tip you pretty good, maybe \$.50 or a quarter. That was good money.

LW: So what did you do with your money?

FP: Well, I'll tell ya. Then I had job down on Salem Avenue with Mr. Filian (??). I shined shoes. I used to shine shoes down on Salem Avenue at his barber shop. I bought my first suit that my mother didn't have to buy for me. It was at Joe Stein's over on Jefferson Street. A clothing store called Joe Stein's. I bought my first suit. I was crazy about that suit. Hung it up down there in the room and my sister had gotten mad with me for something. No, she was up the street playing with the boys. She was kinda tomboyish. My mother said, "Go up there and get her.". I went and got me a switch and went up there and hit her a couple of times to run her home. The next morning, I got up and went back to look at my suit hanging up behind the door and it was in shreds, the first suit I ever bought in my life. She done took a knife and just shredded it. So I told my momma, "If you don't kill her, I am.". (laughing)

LW: What happened? Was she punished?

FP: Oh yeah, she was punished. (laughing)

LW: How long did it take – How long before you got another suit?

FP: I don't remember how long it was. It was my first suit. Every time I'd get a dollar or two dollars, I'd go up there and put it on my suit, layaway, you know, 'til I got that suit. First suit I ever bought in my life. My sister messed that suit up right quick 'cause she knew I was crazy about that suit.

LW: What other memories can you tell me about, young and being at home with your mother? What kinds of chores did you all do around the house?

FP: I did most of the scrubbing, helped my mother wash. I did most everything. My brother didn't. He was always in school. In fact, he was older than I am 'cause when I got a job at the Silk Mill, I helped pay his education in Hampton. 'Cause each one of us kids, when my father got killed, we got so much money a month until we reached the age of 18 through the pension. And my mother got a pension as long as she lived and as long as she didn't marry anymore. Now if she had married then the pension was stopped. So she raised all 5 of us and never married again. He finished school and got his Doctorate. He worked at the VA for a while. He left here and went to Massachusetts after he finished Hampton and got his Doctorate and all up at Boston University. After he retired, he went down to Norfolk State. They wanted him at Hampton but he said by being retired, it was too much work at Hampton. But he was the president of the Hampton Alumni. He traveled all over the United States.

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LW: Did your sisters finish their schooling or -?

FP: No. My sister, younger sister, she worked for Miss Fenerum. (??)

LW: What was your sister's name?

FP: Her name was Bernice. She worked up in Connecticut for one of the richest real estate – In fact, she raised all of their children, my sister did. She went there and got this job. The husband, Mr. Fenerum and Mrs. Fenerum, both of 'em was alcoholics. They had 5 kids. One set of twins and they were 18 months old. And then the other, Joe and the other two girls, there were 5 of them kids. And my sister took over that and when she went to work for the Fenerums, they took them out there on stretcher both the man and the wife. Put them in this - what do you call it? - Rehab or something. She stayed there and raised – They were millionaires. She raised them kids until they got grown my sister did. Then they bought this town in Washington. In fact, they own about the whole town in – Its a shopping center – What's the name of that shopping center right out of Washington? - I see it on TV sometimes. Anyway, they built all these shopping centers over at this place, Mr. Fenerum. And my

sister, when she moved back to Roanoke, Mrs. Fenerum, they came here to the funeral when she died. And the children and all, all of 'em came. They was about the richest family in the Connecticut in real estate. I used to take my kids up there. We used to go on vacation. My niece was living up there. We used to go up there and stay with them and go out on the Cape and they had their own private beach and everything. We used to go out there and my kids used to play with their kids and have a good time. (laughing)

LW: Tell me more about when you were young. Were holidays important in your household? Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving.

FP: Oh yeah.

LW: Did you have extended family that came from the Bedford area or -?

FP: Not really. When we moved back to Roanoke, some of 'em moved here to Roanoke. My cousin and all, they moved from Bedford to Roanoke. It wasn't too much for us to have a good Christmas. We got a little something with 5 kids and nobody but the mother to raise. She raised all 5 of us by herself.

LW: Was Christmas meal, was that special? Christmas dinner?

FP: Oh yeah. I still carry on the tradition of Thanksgiving. I always have Thanksgiving dinner for the family. And then my niece, she has Christmas dinner for the family. I was marking down here the other day how many people were there, and it was about 16. (laughing)

LW: For Thanksgiving?

FP: Uh huh.

LW: So, what's on the menu? And you cook this?

FP: Oh yeah, I cook everything. I got turkey, ham, chiterlings, that was the meat. And what else do we have? Chicken. And greens, collard greens, string beans. I already got my string beans done and frozen in the box. Potato salad – ranch potatoes. You ever eat a ranch potato?

LW: Tell me. What are they?

FP: You take red potatoes and cut 'em in blocks and cook 'em. And then you put a layer of that, a layer of cheese and a layer of ranch dressing and then build it up and then you run it in the stove. You talk about something good. (laughing)

LW: Cheddar cheese? What kind of cheese?

FP: Sharp cheese. And corn pudding. I don't make the corn pudding, my niece makes a better corn pudding than I do. I can make it but my mother taught my niece how to make corn pudding. I was at Kroger's the day before yesterday, they got this canned corn on sale, 10 for \$5 so I got the crushed corn and then whole corn and you mix it. But I can make it but it looks like to me, hers is better than mine. (laughing) And then I got pumpkin pie, sweet potato pie, pound cake. (laughing) I got my pound cakes already ready. And I already got my crust, that Pillsbury crust and I got to get my sweet potato. (laughing)

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LW: And you've been doing that for years?

FP: Oh, I've been doing that ever since my mother passed. My mother has been dead now about 15 or 16 years. I've been doing it every Thanksgiving.

LW: So, before that, you all went to your mother's then?

FP: Oh yeah.

LW: See, my mother lived right across the street. She bought a house right across the street from me. I used to live on Thomas, up the street. So I sold that house and built another one right across from my mother. I think it was '65, I built it. And I'm still there now. A guy told me one time, he said, a fellow I worked with at the Silk Mill, I told him I was getting ready to build a house and he said, "Don't do like I did." He built this big house and he had 3 kids. He said in less than 15 years, they were in there by theirselves, him and his wife. He said, "Don't build no big house." I said, "Well, I've got 3 kids." He

said, "Just build it big enough to get by. In less than 15 years, you're gonna be there by yourself.". And he was true to that. And I built a 5 room brick. Its got 2 bedrooms, living room, den and kitchen and a bathroom upstairs and the basement is finished. One side, I got a couple of refrigerators and freezer, washer and dryer and all of that. And on this side, I got a bookcase, a television and the bar. The guy took the bricks left from the house where he built the house and he built me a bar. His name was James Richardson, worked with Red Charlton (??). He's a good bricklayer. They built the Lawson Building. They laid the brick for the Lawson Building. He made me a bar. A nice long bar. Seats 6 people at the bar. Now, I was there by myself after my wife died and all the kids had gone. My youngest son, he was living up on Staunton and so after him and his wife separated, my daughter and my oldest son said, "Why don't you let Buster come back home with you. You ain't got no business being there by yourself.". So I thought about that thing and I told him. I said to him, "Its up to him, if you want to come back. You can come back if you want to.". People ask me, "Mr. Pendleton, when you gonna get married?". I said, "Get married? I ain't marrying nobody else.". I said, "What I got here is going to my kids. Ain't nobody gonna come in here and take that away from 'em.". And he moved back and he's a big help. He cuts grass and wash dishes. He says, "Don't worry, I'll clean up the dishes.". And he will. And when I had this big party, after I done finished cooking, I go sit down. They do all that. My daughter and all of 'em and my granddaughter, they come in and wash up all the dishes and clean up and everything. I don't do nothing after that. (laughing) I just sit back.

LW: You said that when you were 11 years old, you were a golf caddie so did you learn to play then? And you still play?

FP: Up on Diamond Hill, there's a man that worked at N&W who had a little 3 or 4 hole golf, putting green up there in his yard.

LW: Do you remember his name?

FP: Lawson, Mr. Lawson. And I'll never forget him. He worked at N&W and he drove a Chrysler 77. Thing made like a box back then. I don't know what model it was but I was a youngster during that time and he had this beautiful, I thought it was the prettiest car I ever seen. It was built just like the Hummer. You know how the Hummer in a block, well, that's the way it looked. Chrysler 77. They don't make 'em no more. I don't know when they stopped making 'em. It was battleship gray. I'll never forget that. And we used to go up there and putt around up there until after – and then when I got into golf, Dr. Claytor, out at Kingstown, he had this farm out there. He had a 9 hole sangreen (??) golf course. Every Sunday after church, we used to take – golfers used to take their families, my kids and all and have a picnic. Take a dinner out there and play golf and eat. And Miss Carter – Do you remember Miss Carter who used to run the nursing home? She would come out and cook every Sunday. (laughing)

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LW: How many people came?

FP: Oh it was a good 20 or 30 people. She would fry chicken and all that out there at Claytor farm. Its called Claytor farm. You know Dr. Claytor, you know his sons and all. All of them played golf and we'd go there every Sunday. We'd take our Sunday dinner out there and we'd play golf and there was a swimming pool and everything out there. It was real nice.

LW: We're about to wrap it up. Is there any last thing that you want to tell me that I didn't ask about or -?

FP: Let's see. I don't remember. Oh, you know about over at the graveyard. We used to play down in there at the bottom part of the First Baptist Church Graveyard. That belonged to the First Baptist Church. I guess y'all know that. And the city part was up a little further where they made the come off the interstate right there at Orange Avenue, cut up through there. That was the city's graveyard. When they cut up through there, they found bones and bodies. They just put 'em in a box. I don't know where they carried it. Buried it somewhere else. But, First Baptist graveyard is still there.

LW: So, as boys you used to go down there and play?

FP: We used to play right in the flat part in the graveyard. We used to play down there 'til 10-11 o'clock at night. And my brother – I'll never forget it – he tried to scare us. He got a white sheet and went around and come up behind one of the tombstones with this white sheet on. (laughing) We weren't scared. We got some rocks and started rocking him. (laughing) He was hollering, "Hey! This is me.". (laughing) He was gonna scare us. He got this sheet and come down through there and we was throwing rocks at him.

LW: Well, thank you so much -

FP: Right down there – I don't know whether y'all know it – that was where the motel right across, right there – That was a dump. That was the dump. They dumped trash and everything down there and then they covered it over with dirt after the years and then they built the PiLWa Hut and a trucking company was there and Miss old lady Jabot, she owned it. She owned all that. She offered it to me, the whole square in there where they got the hotel and a motel and all for \$1,000. I said – I had the money to buy it. My momma said, "Miss Jabot says she will sell you that for \$1,000." I said I don't want that old dump. Well, they hadn't covered it over. I said I'm gonna buy me another automobile.

LW: So what did you buy?

FP: I bought another automobile. And so, in later years, that property was worth a whole lot of money. I let it get away from me. It got away and it goes to show that you really ought to look at things. And all along Hart Avenue, there were houses, and they were selling the lots for \$75. I could've bought 'em. I was making money over at the Silk Mill but, no, I had to have another automobile.

LW: Thank you so much for -

FP: I was the first negro that owned a Cadillac in Roanoke.

LW: What year was that? Do you remember?

FP: I bought my first one in '47. They wouldn't even sell a negro a new Cadillac here in Roanoke. Harry Franklin run a poolroom on Henry Street and he went to Norfolk and bought his. Miss Gill, the lady with the stone house up there, she bought one and she went to Bluefield. J.B. Claytor bought one and he went to Bluefield and bought his. So, the boy that worked there. I knew the boy that worked at Cadillac. He said, "They've got a demonstrator out here and its in good shape." That's the one they carry around and show people. He said, "You can buy this. They'll sell you that.". So I went in there and bought that. Then in later years, what happened, the guy from Martinsville took over – They took the franchise away from the guy at the Cadillac place and the guy from Martinsville took it over and he said, "I don't care what color they was. I'll sell 'em a Cadillac.".

LW: He was a businessman.

FP: He was a businessman.

LW: Thank you so much for talking to us this morning. I appreciate it.

FP: Oh yeah. I got another meeting to go to.