

Interviewee: Earl Reynolds, Jr.

Interviewer: Carla Lewis

Transcriber: Andrew Sterling

My name is Carla Lewis and I am the Gainsboro Branch Manager. Today is October 12, 2006. The person that I am interviewing is Mr. Earl Reynolds, Jr. and the location is the Gainsboro Branch Library.

CL: The first question is, when and where were you born?

ER: I was born April 7, 1951, right here in Roanoke, Virginia at Burrell Memorial Hospital.

CL: How long have you lived in the Gainsboro area?

ER: All of my life. From the time I was born until the time I left to go to college which was around 1969 and then back and forth throughout my professional working career.

CL: Can you tell us the name of the streets that you lived on when you were in the Gainsboro area?

ER: I've only lived in one location, 331 Harrison Avenue.

CL: Tell me about your parents, your brothers and sisters.

ER: Well, my dad is Earl B. Reynolds, Sr. and he was an entrepreneur in the Gainsboro community. He was a barber and owned his own barber shop which was located on Henry Street in the Gainsboro community. He moved the barber shop there from Park Street which is still in the greater Gainsboro community. Most folks know it today as 5th Street. My mom is Clara Francis Ferguson Reynolds, deceased. She was a Franklin County native. My dad met her when she was just a teenager and courted her and waited for her to grow up and then he married her. I have 1 sister, Shirley Jean Reynolds who still lives with my dad at 331 Harrison Avenue in the Gainsboro community.

CL: Did you have extended family living with you when you were living on Harrison Avenue in the Gainsboro area?

ER: Yes I did. Most of the folks who lived in the Gainsboro community were nuclear in terms of family relationships. There were grandmas and granddads and aunts and uncles all living together in the same household. Now in my household, there was my dad, mom, my sister, myself and my dad's mother and father, Guy Reynolds and Georgie Reynolds.

CL: Describe your house for us? For instance, was it brick and did you have a large garden? That kind of thing.

ER: The house is brick. It was built in 1921 by my uncle, Aby Reynolds who was the first president and obviously a member of the founding group of the Roanoke Branch of the NAACP. And he worked for the railroad. He was a Pullman porter. He also was a barber. He taught my dad the barbering business when he was a kid and brought him along and, when he passed away, he willed the house to my dad as well as the barber business.

CL: What kind of activities did you participate in?

ER: Oh boy. There was a lot to do in the community. From a school perspective, there were like after-school programs. There was the Gainsboro Branch Library. There was the Hunton (??) YMCA. There were activities sponsored by the community churches and other groups and organizations. So, we stayed pretty busy.

CL: What kind of work have you done throughout your life?

ER: Well, my dad, at the age of 5, decided to bring me slowly into the business. So at the age of 5, he started to take me over to the barber shop and allow me to do such things as sweep the floor, shine shoes, those kinds of things. Of course, I was kinda short and I was really pudgy. I was a heavy little kid. So, back in those days, the sodas were in bottles. They came in bottles. One of the famous sodas, of course, was Coke and my dad had a Coke machine in the barber shop and they would always bring the bottles in these wooden crates. So, I would take the bottles out of the crates and I would stack the

crates up so I could stand on them to do things like wash the windows, the mirrors in the barber shop so the barbers could see what they were doing and things like that. As I got older, I established a very successful shoe shine business on Henry Street. If you ask most people who came along during the time that I did, they would say that one of their memories would be of getting their shoes shined in my dad's barber shop. One of my memories is shining the shoes of famous entertainers that stayed at the Hotel Dumas. One in particular was James Brown. He brought his revue to town and they were playing the Star City Auditorium which was located on Henry Street and I guess I was about 7 or 8 years old. And he came out of the hotel with his entourage, you know, his valets and bodyguards and all those people. And right across the street from the hotel was my dad's barber shop and next door to my dad's barber shop was Kaiser's Music Shop/Record Shop that served primarily the black community although they had customers from all over town. And the first place he went was in the record shop. And he actually signed an autographed picture for the owners who were Mr. and Mrs. Kaiser. Napoleon and Louise Kaiser owned and operated that business. So he signed a picture for them. And they had this big display board in the record shop where they displayed the pictures of all the entertainers that came in and had the signatures on the pictures. And, obviously, he wanted to find out how his record sales were going for certain records that he had out on the market at that time. Then he left there and he came in the barber shop. Well, he had his own personal valet so he didn't need a haircut. They took care of him from head to toe. And he did not need a shoe shine. But, when he was growing up, he shined shoes and so he looked at me and he said, "Would you shine my shoes?". And I looked at his shoes and I said, "But they don't need to be shined". And he looked at me and he says, "Well just shine them anyway". And so he got up on my shoeshine stand and I shined his shoes all over again and he got down and he looked at me and he said, "Thank you very much". And he said, "What do you want to be when you grow up?". And I said, "I don't know yet". And he said, "Stay in school. Get your education.". And he handed me a 5 dollar bill. Now, in those days, this was like 1958/1959, \$5 was a lot of money. And so his entourage took him out and he went back to the hotel and, of course, he prepared himself for his show that night. Extremely, extremely impressive man, very business-like, very organized. When they arrived on Henry Street, it was a – He arrived in a spectacular way. They arrived on Henry Street with about 8 brand new travel buses. The band, his entourage, the other entertainers that performed with him, all traveled in those buses. And, of course, he had his own bus, his very own bus that had his bedroom and his bathroom and his dressing room and all those things. They parked those buses on Henry Street and that was just some kind of sight to behold when they came across Henry Street. People just came out of the shops. I mean, the world just stopped, you know, when the James Brown Revue arrived on Henry Street.

0.10.17.9

CL: Earl, what kind of work have you done throughout your life? You started telling us about your shoeshine business and all the different things that you've done, continue your life. Bring us forth.

ER: Well, one of the things that you learn by hanging around the barber shop is the work ethic and everybody worked. There was – If you didn't work, people kinda looked at you like, "What's the problem" because everyone could get a job doing something. So I worked at my dad's barber shop shining shoes. He taught me how to cut hair, although I never professionally cut hair. I would "bootleg it" as they call it. I would cut hair after 5 o'clock and it was generally just be my closest friends. I worked at Kaiser's Record Shop right next door to my dad's barber shop. I also worked a couple of other places on Henry Street just doing odd jobs for some of the other business people. I worked at a hardware store selling Christmas trees during the Christmas holiday. Now I did that in addition to working in my dad's barber shop. During the winter months – The weather/climate has changed a lot here in Roanoke but in the winter months, we always had snow. We had lots of snow. Of course, the shoe shine business kinda got put on hold. So you've got to find something else to do to supplement your income. So working at the hardware store was like supplementing my income during the winter

months. One of my primary jobs was in December and I would organize the Christmas tree lot and this was right on Shenandoah Avenue, still in the greater Gainsboro community. I would organize the Christmas tree lot. I would receive the trees, the shipments when they came in and I would sell 'em. I was pretty good at it. (chuckle) Every year, they would call me and they said, "Do you want to work in December?" and I said, "Yeah". Whatever you could do to earn money. When I was in high school, I worked for the City of Roanoke and that was back in the days when they weren't all that particular, I don't guess, about ages and all that kind of thing. So I worked for Public Works, the Sanitation Division and that's how I learned the city was from the back of a garbage truck. I ran every route in the city. I knew every street. I knew every alley. I knew every nook and cranny in the city and I did that all the way through college. As a matter of fact, I did it for 3 months after I finished college because I came home, my degree was in education. I wanted to teach but they didn't have any teaching positions. And again, everybody works. You don't sit around the house. And so, I didn't have a car so I got on my bicycle and I rode down to the Public Works Division and I saw the foreman that I had worked with for years. His name was Melvin Matthews and I said, "Melvin, I need a job". He said, "But Earl, you just finished college". I said, "Melvin, I need a job". And he said, "I will let you work only if you promise that you'll get out there and find a job, something in line with your education". And I said, "Deal.". So I worked for Melvin for about 2 ½ months and then I was hired at the Norfolk and Western Railroad in the Car Records Office right over here on Jefferson Street. And I only worked for them for 30 days and I got a letter from the State University of New York at Albany. It had kinda found me. They sent the letter to my old address in Fayetteville, North Carolina, where I went to undergraduate school. And they had to kinda find me. It finally made its way back here to Roanoke and it said, "If you're still interested in coming to graduate school, come on, you've got a full scholarship and a stipend" So I went to my supervisor at the railroad and I said, "I'm leaving.". And he tried to talk me into staying because back in those days, railroad jobs were gold. People fought for those jobs and I was voluntarily giving up a railroad job. He said, "Your next step is to go into the management program". He said, "The sky's the limit. Stay with the railroad." I said, "Bye.". And so I packed my bags again and, again, this was a family thing. My mother and her two brothers drove me to Albany, New York because my mother – Because they had a sister - Still have a sister that lives in Brooklyn, New York. So, they kinda made it a family thing. They took me to school, dropped me off and then they went down to Brooklyn to visit their sister and then they came back to Roanoke. And that was quite an experience.

0.16.38.9

CL: After graduating from graduate school -

ER: I came back to Roanoke and I went to work for George Franklin at the OICs of America which was located under the, I think it was the east-end of the old Victory Stadium complex. I worked for George for about a year. I learned a lot there working for him. George was a very enterprising person. His executive assistant was the late Greta Evans. That's when I first met Greta. His complex manager was Mr. John Divers who's still living. Mr. Divers has been with me part of my life for a number of years. We are related and my memory of him was he was the head maintenance person at Booker T. Washington Junior High School. He worked for the school system. Back in those days, the staff, the support staff at the schools were an integral part of the school family and they would get involved in discipline and coaching and mentoring and all different kinds of things. I recall seeing him everyday and his only question was, "Are you behaving yourself?". And I said, "Yes sir.". And he said, "OK." because I know he'd tell my mom if I wasn't. So anyway, Mr. Divers worked there and many other people who lived in or who had roots in the Gainsboro community. I worked for George for a year and then I left and went to Martinsville, Virginia, to become a Criminal Justice Planner for the West Piedmont Planning District Commission. This was like 1975. I worked for the Planning District Commission from 1975 until 1978. In December, 1978, I returned to Roanoke to become the Human

Resources Planner for the City of Roanoke. From there, I became the Chief of Community Planning and from there, I became the Assistant City Manager and then I left Roanoke again after 14 ½ years with the city. I left Roanoke in February of '92 to become the City Manager of Martinsville, Virginia. I thought I would only do that for a couple of years and then maybe come back to Roanoke or some other community and I ended up staying in Martinsville 3 months shy of 12 years. So, I had a pretty long run there. So, I arrived back in Roanoke in December – December seems to be a month for me – I arrived back in Roanoke in December, 2003, to assume the post of Deputy Executive Director of the Roanoke Redevelopment and Housing Authority. So, I'm back.

0.20.35.4

CL: Let's talk a little bit about your school life. You told us about some of the education that you have had, but let's go back to elementary school and talk a little bit about the schools that you attended.

ER: Great time. Good people. Again, very community oriented, community focused because the teachers and the support staff either lived in or had roots in the Gainsboro community. First grade, Mrs. Turpin. Second grade, Mrs. Turpin. Third grade, Mrs. Clark. Fourth grade, Mrs. Stovall, Elaine Stovall. Fifth grade, Mrs. Holland. Sixth grade, Mrs. Patterson. And, of course, there were other instructors involved in my education as well. Memorable among those was a gentleman by the name of John Dillon and Mrs. McCatt (??) who taught Home Economics and in her class, I made my mother an apron. My mother is deceased now but that apron is still at 331 Harrison Avenue in the drawer. And every now and then, I get it out and look at it. Then Booker T. Washington Junior High School – By the way, the schools were positioned so we could walk. There was no busing. So I walked to Harrison. I walked to Booker T. Booker T. was 7th, 8th, and 9th grade. Back in those days, again, junior high school, they don't call it that anymore. A place, kind of an incubator. The Principal was Mr. Sid Norr. The Vice Principal was Mr. Austin who also lived on Harrison Avenue in Gainsboro. So he was like right down the street. Teachers that I recall of note, Mrs. Allen, Mrs. Moore, Mrs. Poindexter/Eunice Poindexter. I took speech and grammar and I shall never forget the first day in her class. She was an elegant lady and a very well-spoken lady. She looked at us and she said, "Class, my name is Mrs. Poindexter". And she said, "Repeat that". And the entire time I was in her class, the thing that she stressed was that you have to have a mastery of the King's English. She was – Anyway, she made a big impression on me. The late Mr. Perry was a homeroom teacher of mine as well as a Science teacher. Mrs. Coleman, Sally T. Coleman. Mrs. Ennis (??) taught me French. You know you always leave out somebody but there are many, many others. Mr. Chubb, I was in his class. He would often-times say, "Reynolds, see me after school.". I was in his after-school class for cutting up sometimes. A memory there is in Lincoln Terrace, now called the Villages at Lincoln. But in the Lincoln Terrace community, there was a store, called Neighbors Confectionery and family-owned, Mr. and Mrs. Neighbors. They had the best hot dogs in the city, at least we thought so. We planned the great escape. It was about 6 of us and we planned a circuitous route to the store at lunch time so we could have hot dogs and in order to get back to the next class and not be missed or detected. Now, of course, there were a lot of eyes around the school, one of them being – The biggest hurdle we had was to get past John Divers. John Divers was always watching to make sure that kids weren't leaving the campus when they weren't supposed to. Somehow or another, we thought we got past Mr. Divers. He saw us and reported it to the office and Mr. Austin, Lloyd Austin, shows up at the store. We had just finished eating those hot dogs and he walks in and he's got the "board of education". And he says, "OK, get out here and line up". And so we came out of the store and we lined up. And he walked us back down that hill into the office where we got a paddling for being off campus and then we had to sit there while each parent was called. My mother and dad worked. So, my dad had to leave the barber shop and come get me because I got suspended for the remainder of the day. And, needless to say, that was not something that I wanted to have to face my dad to account for that. So, the hot dogs were good but, it was a terrible price to pay for what happened after that. Then from Booker T., - Let me make sure I didn't forget

anybody from Booker T. (pause) - Mr. Jones had a business in the community, he was a brick layer but he was also a Shop teacher at Booker T. There were two Shop teachers. One was Mr. Atkinson and he taught woodworking and that kind of thing and then there was another Shop teacher that taught us the masonry trade, how to work with concrete and bricks and that kind of thing. He also had a business where he did that for contractors and I will think of his name is just a minute. Moving on to Lucy Addison High School. That was a big deal. I got to take you back to when I was a kid, sitting on the sidewalk in front of the house on Harrison Avenue, 4 or 5 years old. The highlight of the day, I'd get up every morning just to sit out there and watch the kids walk to Lucy Addison because that was a goal. That was a dream to attend Lucy Addison High School. They were always well-dressed, books in hand. Some of the young men carried the young ladies books, those kinds of things. You would just sit there and you would just marvel. You just couldn't wait to grow up to go to Lucy Addison. The other thing that kind of charged your senses was during the day – Now we're at home, we're not even old enough to go to school, we're 4 or 5 years old – But during the day, the late Joe Finley (??) was the band director at Lucy Addison and he developed a band that was second to none. They actually played half-time at a pro football game in New York. My cousin was 1st Trumpet and I actually got to see him play on national TV. They would practice during the day and you could hear them all over the community. We would just wait and when we would hear the drums strike up, everybody sat down just to listen to that band and during Christmas, they led the Roanoke City Christmas Parade every year, every year. And people would just wait to see the Lucy Addison High School band. And people would throw money at them when they marched down the street. They would actually throw money at 'em. Of course, Mr. Finley was a very smart and enterprising man and after that happened the first year, the second year he was prepared. He had students that came behind the band with these buckets that picked up the money. (chuckle) And the money, of course, was used for instruments and to do other things at the school. You arrive at Lucy Addison and, of course, you're either going to play in the band, sing in the choir. They had also a tremendous choir that toured all over Virginia and outside of Virginia. Or you played football or basketball. Well, I was a football player. And so, the principal was - The late John Powers was the Assistant Principal, one of the assistant principals. Mr. Coleman was an assistant principal. But Mr. - I'll remember it in a minute. Husa Day (??) was my homeroom teacher – One of my homeroom teachers. It was Mr. uh – When I graduated, the principal was Julian Moore. But when I started – I'll think of it in a minute. I knew it just a few minutes ago when I was talking about Mr. Atkinson and the others over at Booker T. He was a great community leader, very active in the Hunton YMCA. I'll get it in a second. There was a whole entourage of teachers at Lucy Addison. Again, I mentioned Mr. Day was my homeroom teacher for several years. The late John Powell, Mr. Skipper, the late Bernard Brown who was our football coach, Joe Morman football coach and also Physical Education and Health instructor. The late Irving Cannaday (??) who also was in the football/basketball program/Health/Physical Education and Science teacher. Mrs. Dorothy Whitton (??) who is still living across the street from Burrell Memorial Hospital. She taught me Algebra and Mr. - I'll never forget – He taught me English, Grammar and Composition. I can see his face and I just saw him a couple of days ago.

0.33.35.4

CL: Earl, don't worry about it. How much schooling did any other person in your household complete?

ER: My dad finished Lucy Addison High School – The old Lucy Addison High School which was Booker T. And then, of course, the high school we know as Lucy Addison sits up on the hill there on Orange Avenue was not built and opened until 1951. Everyone went to the old high school. My mom did not finish high school. She eventually got her GED around 1965 or 1966. My sister did not finish high school. She eventually got her GED and then went on to get her Associates from National Business College.

CL: OK, I wanted to talk about your home life a little bit. Describe your home life. For instance, did you gather around the radio, the TV or when did you get the radio, TV, telephone. Describe some of the things that happened in your household.

ER: That was a time that you related to your grandparents. They did a lot of the child rearing because mom and dad worked. My grandmother was always there. Everybody called her Aunt Georgie and she was the king of what I call the tea towel. Back in the day, the older women would have this kitchen towel that they called a teal towel. They always kept it on their shoulder because she was always washing dishes or had her hands wet or whatever and then she'd grab this towel and dry her hands. Well, because the towel stayed moist or damp, it was also a treacherous weapon against kids.

Whenever we got out of line, she would just pop you with that towel. That would get you back in line real quick. She – I recall sitting with her and listening to the radio and I remember listening to Richard Nixon and he was Vice President of the United States at that time. The President of the United States was Dwight Eisenhower. I remember listening to them talk about Korea and what was going on in Korea at that time. My grandfather obviously was an avid radio listener. That's what he grew up with was radio, Guy Reynolds, and I remember listening to certain old radio shows with him, Amos and Andy, The Shadow and those old shows that came on the radio. Also, there was always professional boxing on the radio. I remember listening to the fight between Floyd Patterson was fighting somebody – Sugar Ray Robinson and Dick Tiger, those boxers back in the '50s and you listened to them on the radio. Probably the most dramatic thing I saw on TV – We had an old black and white RCA with the rabbit ears with aluminum foil on them – I saw with my grandmother and grandfather sitting there – saw the funeral of John Kennedy. I also saw the march on Washington and ML King's "I Have A Dream" speech. I remember seeing that.

0.40.19.3

CL: Do you remember your parents sitting on the front porch after dinner talking to the neighbors or just talking to the children? Could you elaborate on that just a little bit for us.

ER: Well my mother was the community welcome wagon. She was known as the surrogate parent for all the kids. A lot of kids stayed at my house all the time. The door was always swinging. In the evenings, I remember sitting out – Dad was always gone. - But I remember sitting out on the porch with my mom – Well, early years, sitting out on the porch with my grandmother and grandfather and then once my sister and I got to be teenagers, they moved. Because, you see, there were only 3 bedrooms in the house and my grandparents had a bedroom. My sister and I had a bedroom and then, of course, my mom and dad. Well, once we got to be teenagers, my grandparents said, "They need their own rooms." So they moved right behind us, right across the alley on Rutheford Avenue so my sister and I could have our own bedrooms. Then I recall sitting out with my mom and the neighbors next door and they would just talk and have these conversations about life and what was going on and those kinds of things. 'Cause back in those days, children were seen and not heard so you would sit and you would listen to these adult conversations but you never opened your mouth. That's kinda how you learned things was to listen.

CL: Do you ever remember hearing a story about the Civil War or slavery or recipes or stories that were passed down from generation to generation to generation?

ER: Yes.

CL: You do remember that?

ER: My grandmother and grandfather, they were from Patrick County. They were born and raised in Patrick County. My daddy was born in Patrick County and raised there until my grandparents moved to Roanoke. I recall my grandfather talking about working on a farm in Patrick County and actually witnessing Klu Klux Klan activity and he and some of his friends – You know, again, my granddaddy would take me with him downtown on the city market and he and some of his friends would stand around and talk and, again, I'm standing there and you listen, you don't get involved with the

conversation, you'd just stand there. I recall them talking about Klan activity and they referred to them as the "Kluxers". And they would say, "I understand that the Kluxers did this, that and the other in some community". And somebody would say, "Yeah, I heard about that too.". And, of course, back then, I'm trying to figure out – Kluxers, Kluxers, what are they talking about? - because you dare not ask. You would just be quiet. And I also heard my grandmother talking about her experience growing up. She came from a large family and when the girls got to be 9 or 10 years old, they knew how to keep house. They knew how to take care of younger siblings, etc. And I remember her telling me that her mother, that she was asked for. I said, "What does that mean?" That means that there was a prominent lady in the community – white lady – who needed help and had heard that my grandmother was good with children and knew how to keep house and that kind of thing. So she went to my grandmother's mother and said, "Can I have Georgie Mildred?". And they worked out the arrangement and then she went to live with this lady and helped raise her children and keep her house. She said she ran away because the lady was mean to her and she went home. She ran back home and the lady came back and she said her mother said, "No, you can't have Georgie because you were mean to her". And that was a big thing back then to say no, particularly to a prominent family in the community, Caucasian family in the community. So I do remember her talking about that.

0.45.28.5

CL: Did you, your spouse, siblings or children serve in the military?

ER: No. Back during the days of Vietnam, I was in college. Now, I was subject to the draft but I think it was two things that kept me out of the draft. Number one, I was in college. And number two, I was my dad's only son. And back then, they would put you in a special category if you were the only surviving male in the family.

CL: What is your fondest childhood memory?

ER: Probably Christmas in Gainsboro. It was just spectacular, the decorations – You know, again, the climate has changed quite a bit, global warming or whatever they want to call it. I mean, we really had winters and they would most of the time, somewhere around Christmas, there would be snowfall. So, just gearing up for the holiday season, the cooking, the smells, the community and church activities around the holidays were always very, very nice.

CL: What are some of your memories of the Gainsboro Library?

ER: Oh boy. (chuckling) Mrs. Lee who also lived on Harrison Avenue. She lived about 5 houses down from me and I would see her every day. She would walk to work, of course, down Harrison Avenue right over here to the library and the many, many programs that she initiated for us. More particularly, the reading programs. That was her number one thing is that, if you're going to survive – If you can't read, you can't learn. And so, she was very regimented about that and created a lot of programs to entice us, to encourage us to read. One of the programs that I recall was what we called the "Gold Star Program". Every time you read so many books, you got a gold star. And it was on the board right over here. She had a board and she had all the kids names on it. And whenever you read so many books, you'd get a gold star. And then at the end of a certain reading period, whoever had the most stars would get some type of recognition. Of course, I was very competitive so I was always trying to hang in there and win that prize, whatever it was. That door would swing every day. I'd be in here every day. And she said, "Earl, are you sure you read these books?". And I said, "Yes ma'am". And she said, "Come over here.". Now see, you learned the librarian reads also. And the books that I would select, she would always, either she had read them or she had some knowledge of them and so she would talk to me about the books to make sure that I wasn't cheating. That I had actually read these books. And see, the word gets around that Mrs. Lee is going to ask you about these books. So you can't just read the first chapter and the last chapter and take the book back to the library. You know, you've got to read it from cover to cover. Just coming down here and being exposed to that kind of mentoring meant a lot to all of us here in the community. And again, right across the street was the

Hunton Y and there was Mr. Heller who I recall was one of the managers over there and he looked out for us and created activities for us as well. One of my coaches – I guess you would call it Little league football coaches, a gentleman by the name of Sammy Davis also worked there at the Y and, of course, Mr. Keeling, the late Mr. Keeling, who also did a lot to further the programs there at the Y and to try to move it to another level by joining with the main Y downtown. I think that happened during his administration as well.

0.50.41.8

CL: Earl, I remember when you had a daughter. She was very little and you came to the library and we could not believe you brought your daughter to the same library that you grew up in and the age that she was. She was still in diapers and she was still in the carrying case. Tell us about that. And right today, Ashley comes in, she's a law student now but when she comes home for the weekends, more than likely, Ashley is here in the library.

ER: That's right.

CL: Getting books, reading books. So, I think you started that a long time ago. Could you elaborate on that just a little bit because of my experience?

ER: When she was old enough to take her out into the community, I always took her with me everywhere I went. That was back in the days before mandatory child safety seats and all that kind of thing. (chuckling) So she rode right in the front seat of the car with me right up on the arm rest and I would bring her here to the library because I wanted her to get accustomed to books, to learning, that whole process of learning. One of my fondest memories is taking her up to Harrison Elementary School. Now this was before Mrs. Thompson mounted her campaign to have the school renovated which now houses the Harrison Museum of African-American history. So, when I took her up there to the schoolyard, the school was vacant, abandoned and run-down. I sat her there in the schoolyard and told her the story of Harrison Elementary School. And what it meant to me and the community and why it was important that we do something with that building to make sure that that story continued to be told. So, ever since – I had heard someplace, I don't know where, maybe I read it, that infants are just incubators for learning. And even though they can't talk, if you talk to them, they understand. So, from the time Ashley was born, I talked to her. I would tell her stories and I would take her places and I could see that she was just like a sponge. She was absorbing this stuff and so I just kept doing it.

0.53.24.3

CL: OK. We just have one or two more questions and I would just like to ask, who were some of your role models or community leaders when you grew up? You mentioned quite a few of them, but did you have one or two in particular that you said, "This is my role model"?

ER: Well, there were just so many folks in the community. First of all, the older gentlemen in the community irrespective of their jobs, were always very well-dressed so that kind of set the tone for us. It wasn't about this walking around holding your pants up kind of stuff. It was all about presentation. How you present yourself. And by the way, a real quick story on that. When I first got back here from college, and was having a difficult time finding a job, one of my drawbacks was I didn't have a car. I had an education, no car. I was riding around on the bus trying to go to places and get employment. So, I remember something my daddy told me. My daddy always told me, "Even though you don't have any money, you don't have to look like it". So I put a suit and tie on and I went downtown to the bank and I saw the loan officer, a gentleman by the name of Joe Judy. I said, "Mr. Judy, I don't have a job yet. I'm having difficulty finding a job because of transportation. I need a car." And he looked at me and he said – He wrote down a name and he said, "See this gentleman up at the Buick place", which was at that time, it was located across from Jefferson High School on West Campbell Avenue. And so I went up there, and I gave him that note, and he said, "Yes, Mr. Judy called and said you were on the way." And he said, "Do you see something that you like?". And they had this 1973 Buick Riviera sitting on the showroom floor. And I said, "Yeah, I like that car right there". And the price tag on it at

that time, a brand-new Buick back in those days, was \$5,400. That was a lot of money. And he said, "Come on into the office". And he wrote it up and he got on the phone and he called Judy and in an hour, he gave me the keys. He said, "That's your car". I didn't even have a job. But what Mr. Judy told me, he said, "You've got potential." And he said, "I knew that you would be able to pay these notes after you got a job." That's also a story that relates to local banking, home town banking as opposed to the banking that we have today. The bankers knew everybody in the community and so they were able to do those kinds of things to help families and individuals which is kind of tough today because the banking industry has changed so much. But anyway, I was the recipient of that as well as the recipient of the good advice of my father that, "Because you don't have any money, you don't have to look like it". Now back to the original question and that was other folks in the community who were like role models. Mr. and Mrs. Barlow at the Dumas Hotel. They were a very outstanding family in the community and particularly Mrs. Barlow took a lot of time to mentor the young people. And she came in contact with us because at the Dumas Hotel, there was a malt shop, if you want to call it that, and it was called Jack and Jill, named after her daughters. And we all went in there and she had an opportunity to interact with us, and encourage us with our education and our behavior. You know, "I saw you doing this the other day. Don't you do that any more." That kind of thing. Mr. and Mrs. Kaiser of Kaiser's record shop. Business people as Mrs. Kaiser was just a tremendous lady. She also taught me the value of reading. She would just read, read, read. Her husband worked at the VA Medical Center but he was also an entrepreneur. He owned the record shop. So that teaches you, again, the work ethic. That you've got to work for what you get. There was another gentleman who owned the Palace Hotel on Henry Street. His name was Billy Salters. We called him Uncle Billy. His business was the Jukebox business. Back in the day, you had the jukeboxes with the records in them. You would pay your money and it would play the record, right? So he had jukeboxes in very remote locations throughout the community that the other folks would not serve. So he kinda filled that niche. Another person that did that built a business around filling a niche was A. Byron Smith (??). He was another person in the community who was a very outstanding person. Connie Hamler, she was in the real estate business. Physicians in the community. Attorneys in the community. Judge Harris, well now he's Judge Harris but when he was an attorney on Henry Street. Attorney Lawson. Ministers in the community, R. R. Wilkerson, E. T. Burton, Noel Taylor, just on and on. All of those folks because they came through Henry Street and I had that kind of contact and relationship with folks that you would always look up to.

CL: Earl, thank you. We really appreciate you coming in to interview with us. Is there anything else you would like to tell us that we didn't ask today?

ER: I guess we kind of covered the waterfront here. So, I appreciate the opportunity.

CL: Thank you so much.