

Warren Hegstrom
Narrator

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Interviewer

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Transcriber

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CS: Cole Steinberg

WH: Warren Hegstrom

CS: This is an interview conducted as part of a larger faculty and student research project initiated by Dr. Julie Luker of Concordia University, St. Paul. Today is June 21, 2022, and I'm here with Warren Hegstrom. My name is Cole Steinberg, and I am undergraduate student at Concordia University, St. Paul. Today I'll be talking to Warren about what life was like growing up in the Twin Cities. During this interview, I'm going to ask you to reflect on your childhood experiences as they relate to a variety of social topics from that time period. For the purposes of this interview, we have defined childhood as birth through 17 years of age. To begin, please state and spell your full name, including a maiden name if applicable.

WH: Okay. My name is Warren Joseph Hegstrom.

CS: Please identify your race and gender.

WH: White, and I'm a male. I got a beard.

CS: Please state your date of birth.

WH: July 27, 1949.

CS: Finally, please share where you grew up, such as the name of the neighborhood or a nearby street intersection. Include any major moves you made during this time period.

WH: My earliest recollections of being raised in—we call it the Lower West Side at that time. My parents sent me to, I think, Assumption the first kindergarten and first grade. Then I don't know what happened. Ran out of money, whatever, but I ended up in Lafayette School, Lafayette Elementary School in St. Paul. I think it was on State Street. Then now there's a bridge named after it. That's what I assume they did, where they got the name from, but I don't know. That's just my thoughts on it. Anyways, so as I showed a picture earlier, my class that I remember most and my classmates, it was half white, and the other was mixed. In my picture here, I don't see any Blacks, but there was all the other mixes, like Hispanic. I believe there's some Jewish. There could have been some Lebanese there and then a few white people—like I said, 14 white people. The rest were—there was 24 in my class, so 14 of us were white. That's the context of what—

how I grew up. My friends were not necessarily all white. I had a Polish friend. I had lots of Mexican friends, Hispanic, and--let's see—Jewish friends, I think I had. The neighborhood, I believe, was safe for me and my family. I never felt afraid to be living down there. I know I've talked to people that were afraid to go down in that area at that time when I was there, but I never felt that. Yeah, so, yeah, I want to talk about that. Then I'll tell you what was in the neighborhood that made it special to me and to a lot of us actually. It was more or less a poor section. It was started by the Jewish immigrants. Groups would come through there, Gypsies. My brother remembers Gypsy stories that I don't remember. That's what I'm upset with him because he was telling me stories about the Gypsies, and I was like, "What?" Yeah, they would come into town, and sometimes they weren't very nice and clean, so but anyways. What was in the neighborhood was a place called the Neighborhood House. I believe it was where the Festival of Nations started because some of my friends, I used to go to pow wows down there. This great big building that they had down there was, I think, paid for or built by the Jewish people. They're still on Summit Avenue, that big, Jewish church there. They have a women's group there that I think fed a lot of money down there. A lot of us kids didn't have skates or stuff like that, so we would go to The Warming House. They'd give us skates. We'd skate and all, and then they'd have games. We'd have street dances. Oh, man, they were great. Street dances closed down the whole neighborhoods, and then there was 4th of July celebrations. Oh, my goodness. Oh, they were great. There was a character down there. I don't know if he was mafia or just a local gangster. His name was Gaston. I don't know if you guys have heard that name before, but you might research that name because he was—I don't know. To me, he seemed like kind of a kingpin down there 'cause usually things went through him. Especially on 4th of July, he would make a spread like you wouldn't believe. None of them, I don't think, was authorized. I lived right next door. I lived on Fairfield Avenue. Why I remember this, I don't know. [*Crying 06:26-06:34*] Sorry.

CS: Oh, no. It's okay. Take your time.

WH: It was 196 East Fairfield. That's where I grew up. We had two different houses we lived in. The first house that I remember, we lived next door to Our Lady of Guadalupe. Then we moved over, and then we lived next to the Jewish synagogue. That's what was down there. I'd be in my bed, and they would be—so I'd lay in my bed, so it was on my right side, and we would hear all the celebrations going on way past midnight and them singing and stuff like that. It was great. My friends were the [Varilla 7:27] family. They must have had a dozen kids. I don't know—Mexicans, and they would help me out, me and my brother. Mom and dad struggled with addictions, so a lot of the Mexican kids I hung out with and their mamas—I don't know if they knew what was going on at our house or what, but they would always take me in. "Here, have some enchiladas. Have some tacos. Have some beans and burritos." Yeah, so, and then also, mom and dad worked at Coronado Restaurant down there. That was a big Mexican restaurant. Well, nowadays it was just a little cracker box, but if you look back on it, it was a cracker box.

My brother worked there. He made sausages, chorizos, and I would walk in there, too, after school. Mama Coronado would grab a hold of me and drag me in the kitchen and feed me all this really good Mexican food. I mean, it was the real stuff. Mom and dad worked for them for over 20 years. Mom would cook or waitress and cook sometimes, and dad would cook the American-style food. We had a great relationship with that family. Papa Coronado would take me, and my brother, and my dad fishing up in Mille Lacs. I know there probably was racism down there, but as far as I'm concerned, I didn't see much of it. Maybe if you weren't from the area, it could have been 'cause some people I've talked to said there was kind of gangs down there. Like I said, I never was afraid. I never had any fear. My religious upbringing was I was confirmed by the Catholic Church, Our Lady of Guadalupe. One of the few white guys there. Actually, there was some racism there because my older brother, he was an altar boy, and he was the only white boy. One day, the pastor came to him, said, "You know, Keith, we can't have you anymore 'cause I'm getting too many complaints." I guess there's racism from that side, but that was Father Ward. Then there was Sister Cecilia. The Catholic Church was very prominent down there. They would get food. They would get army-base beds and mattresses. My brother would drag 'em home. We used to get bread from 'em and stuff. Then sometimes during the hot summer days, they'd have—Sister Cecilia would make up these—well, now they're called ice cream or Icee's. It's a cone. They throw a bunch of ice in there, and they grind it all up, and then they put some syrup on it. Yeah. She would do that, and I don't know if they were free or whatever. Then one other thing about childhood that was weird, and it was great at the same time. On Saturdays—I don't know—I'd get 50 cents—I don't know—quarter. I don't know how much I got. A bunch of us guys would go down to Wilder's, the Wilder's Corporation, or the Wilder Foundation. Now it's the foundation, Wilder's Foundation. We'd all line up outside the building, and then we'd go inside the building, take all our clothes off, and we'd get a little tag with our number of our locker where we put all our clothes, and then we'd go swimming, all naked. This is documented, by the way. You can look that up, and you can call up the—I happen to have my wife's cousin, first cousin. She just retired from there, and I asked her about it one day. I said, "Why were we naked?" It could have been that they're worried about—I mean, it wasn't a clean neighborhood, so there might have been some diseases or whatever. Anyways, we had fun. Then afterwards, we'd go right across the street to the White Castle there and buy one or two White Castles and a water or pop. I don't know what else. Then we'd go home. Yeah, so that was a big deal in the summertime. In the fall and the wintertime, so we lived right across the street from a huge—well, I called it huge park. It must have been at least four blocks long and about three blocks wide. I think it might have been used for drainage for the Mississippi River or something. I don't know. That's my imagination, but that's where they had a Warming House. You could go down there and get games and play games. We would skate, and skate, skate, skate all till the white lights went out, and then we'd still skate. They had a potbelly stove, a coal stove, by the lake. Yeah, it did. We had a great time. I mean, yeah, we'd play because I lived right across the street from it. I didn't even take off my shoes sometimes. I'd just run across the street and—

CS: Okay. I'm going to start asking questions to sort of guide the conversation a little bit.

WH: [*Coughs*] Excuse me.

CS: I would like to learn more about your family life. Let's begin with the memories you have for immediate and extended family. Will you share some memories that you have about these relationships?

WH: Like I mentioned before, [*Coughs*]*—*excuse me*—*so mom and dad struggled with addiction. My relationship with mom and dad was, I better get out of here. I don't want to get hurt. I don't want to be around all the stuff that's going down, so I would go hang out with my friends, the Mexican friends. I had some Indian friends, Larry the Polish guy, and there was a few Blacks. I don't remember a lot of Black people there, but there was a Black family that we were close to. I didn't spend much time at home. Mom and dad, I don't think they ever knew where we were. We were just out somewhere. Then the parents would kind of parent us and help us out, feed us and stuff like that. The relationship with mom and dad wasn't all that great at that time in their lives. We had family. My brother, my next brother, is three years older than me. Yeah, we were kind of close, not real close because—I don't know—just because of the family thing going on that we just tried to hide. I'm really good at hiding, so I was like, "I don't want them to see me." I mean, there was one good incident, that I happened to break somebody's window, and dad was pretty kind to me. He took me down there to the people I broke the window, and he paid it up and made it right. ... Yeah, so what else? Well, we were told not to go to the Mississippi River. What do you think we did? [*Laughter*] I swam in the Mississippi. I fished in the Mississippi. I played on the barge boats that were moored out there. Oh, man, it was great. We'd just have a great time there. Once dad caught us. Somebody told on us. He kind of gave us a whipping for it, but we went back, and it was fun. It was great. I'd bring home catfish. Mostly catfish we brought home to eat. Mom would show us how to—mom was a great cook. She really could cook anything. She told us how to clean them, and she cooked them up and stuff, so yeah.

CS: Good. Thank you. Next, please describe the ways in which your family's economic status influenced your childhood. I know you kind of already touched on this at the beginning, but if you want to expand on that, yeah, go ahead.

WH: I don't know how we were economically, but I just knew mom and dad didn't have a lot of money. I think I remember one—we had an old Studebaker. They had a Studebaker at that time in their lives. They had an old Studebaker. That was a big deal. They did kind of save some money. A lot of times, economically we weren't that well off. I mean, we weren't. There would be organizations that would come down and pick out some of us kids, and then we'd go get some Christmas presents or stuff like that. Dad taught me how to shop the thrift shops. I'd go with him for that, so it wasn't always bad. You know what, but it did affect me. Otherwise, economics like that, yeah, we tried to make up, tried to make money where we could. I don't ever remember making any money, so but, you know.

CS: In what way has your family's financial circumstances shaped your spending habits today?

WH: Oh, good question. I don't like to spend. I mean, I live in a nice home, but I'm retired now. I've worked hard all my life. Sometimes my wife calls me a penny pincher, and sometimes she calls me a great spender, so somewhere in between all that. There wasn't always a lot of food around the table, so I always make sure there's lots of food in the house. She yells at me for that, so that must be why I am the way I am because there wasn't all that much food. Yeah, anyways, at times there was. I think the [Coronado's] would help us out, too, the restaurant people. One day, they—my dad or my mom brought home a whole case of eggs. There's like 20 dozen in there or something, so yeah. Mom usually worked at other restaurants, too. She worked at the Coffee Cup downtown. I'd walk across the Robert Street Bridge and go to the Coffee Cup, and she'd feed me and stuff. Yeah.

CS: I don't know if I caught what your father did for work. What did he do for work?

WH: I started out my career as a nurse's aide, orderly they called them back then. I was an orderly at Deaconess Hospital. Then after that, I was an orderly at St. Mary's Hospital in Minneapolis.

CS: Oh, I meant your father. I'm sorry.

WH: Huh?

CS: I meant your father. I'm sorry.

WH: Oh, okay. All right, I'm sorry. Maybe I didn't hear it right. My dad was a cook and a butcher, and he had the fingers that were missing to prove it. *[Laughter]* I think he had half of a thumb and a couple of fingers missing. Anyway, he was a butcher, cook, yeah, chef. He even had his own—well, he didn't have his own restaurant, but they hired him on as a chef, and they called him a chef. I got that piece of paper somewhere, but I think it was out—he wasn't in that area. He was Upper West Side or towards—what is that now? Cesar Chavez Road now. He might have been up by that. I can't remember now. Anyways, yeah, so that's what he did. He worked, yeah. When he was straight, he could work and bring home money. That's probably how we got the car. Mom never drove. She was always a waitress and a cook. She was so good at what she did that the cooks or the chefs would drag her into the kitchen, teach her how to cook stuff. She worked at a lot of different restaurants in the St. Paul area. There was a Louisiana style close to the Cathedral. I'm trying to think of that street. I don't know if it was on Selby. It could have been on Selby and Dale, around that *[crosstalk 23:20]*. Then what else did she do? Well, the Coffee Cup. I guess that's all I can remember right now, and then the Mexican people, Coronado's. Yeah.

CS: Great. Now I would like to talk about your experiences with religion, such as Catholicism, Lutheranism, et cetera. Describe what you can recall about your family's religious practices when you were growing up.

WH: All right, cool. First of all, I don't think there were any Lutherans down there that I remember. Maybe there were, but I don't remember. I'm sure there was. I was raised in the Catholic Church. I made my First Communion at Our Lady of Guadalupe. Like I said before, I went through their Catechism and everything. Mom and dad insisted—or maybe it was mom. Mom insisted I go, so I did. Yeah. Their affiliation was nothing. They made us go, but they never

went. I think dad, his religious upbringing was more of evangelical because he came from Northwest [Strandquist], Karlstad, Warren, Minnesota. Supposedly that's how I got my name. I don't know if that's a true statement, but that's the story around. All right, so and then, yeah, so my brother and I both went to the Catholic Church. Yeah. We went pretty regularly, I think. I don't know. I can't remember if we went all the time. The Catholic Church was always generous to the population down there. They would have Easter egg hunts and giveaways and stuff like that, so yeah.

CS: Okay. Now I'd like to learn more about the neighborhood in which you grew up. If you moved during your childhood, you may wish to reflect on more than one neighborhood. This is fine to do, but please indicate as you do it. Please describe what comes to mind when thinking about the neighborhood in which you grew up.

WH: Okay, so talking about the West Side, as best I can recall is I was there from the time I was about 6 till the time I was about 12, so 6 years. It's only six years that I was there. What they did was they came in, and the city bought us all out. They tore everything, all the houses down except for Holman Field. Everybody dispersed. They broke up the whole thing. I ended up in South Minneapolis. Actually, my junior years, like some of eighth and ninth or eighth and ninth, because I went to Roosevelt in St. Paul on the Upper West Side for about three-quarters to a year there. Then they kicked us all out of there, and so we had to move to Minneapolis. Yeah, well, there was a bad incident, if you want to really hear about a bad incident. One of the—

CS: If you don't mind describing it, I mean, if—you don't have to.

WH: Like I said, mom and dad struggled. Dad had come from a large family. Mom only knew her sister. Dad had 11 in his family, and his brothers were Oscar, Marvin, and mostly Oscar and Marvin. Then they had some buddies, and so they would come to our house, drink, and gamble, and fight. One day, I came home. Dad and Oscar were drinking and playing cards, and my uncle had a way of egging him on all the time. The next thing I know, dad runs, gets a knife. My uncle grabs a chair. I grabbed my mother. I said, "We got to go call the cops," because we didn't have a phone. We couldn't afford one, or we couldn't pay for one. I don't know. We ran downstairs. They had a phone. We called. By time I got back up, so here's the scene. I come in. We come in the back door. Dad's got the butcher knife. He's in the sink. He's cleaning it off. My uncle's sitting on a chair. His arm is all slashed open, and there's blood everywhere, just everywhere. We had to call the police. Here I am. I don't know. I think I was 11 or 12. I don't know, but somewhere around that. The blood's just pumping out of him. I'm going, "Man, he's going to die." I don't know where I got this information from, but I grabbed one of our towels, and I grabbed a spoon, and I cut off his blood supply, put the tourniquet on him and cut off the blood supply. Then—

CS: That's pretty crafty. How old were you when you did that?

WH: 11 or 12. I don't know. 11 or 12, I guess.

CS: That awfully smart.

WH: Then the police, paramedics, I don't know who all came. I think it was the police or paramedic looked at me, and he said, "Did you relieve the blood yet?" What does that mean? I

didn't have a mean what that meant, meaning if you don't let the blood supply flow a little bit, you're going to lose your whole arm. He just looked at me and shook his head, and they took care of it. Yeah, so from that incident, the family kind of split. There was no arrest. My uncle's family. He wouldn't press charges, but they did send dad to Wilmar for a year. Mom went to Ramsey—yeah, it was called Ramsey at the time, yeah—to be cleaned up and dried out. After that, welfare stepped in, and I went to a foster home. My brother went to live with his sister in the Tanner's Lake area. That was one thing that happened that was a major trauma. It worked out. I mean, after that, things did change up. Then right after that, we moved to Minneapolis, and dad began going to AA, and mom began going to AA. He got a job as a—I think it was a butcher shop Downtown Minneapolis. They started doing better. Then so that's when I was about 12, 13 then. Must have been 13 somewhat. Then I ended up in Bryant Junior High and in Minneapolis, South Minneapolis. Again, a mixed bag of people, but all my friends were white, though. I hung out with a gang. They're all whites. None of them were—yeah, but anyways, but I had a lot of Black friends, but I never hung out with them, but not like the other kids because there were kind of in the neighborhood. That was in South Minneapolis. Then mom and dad began to prosper after that, and then they actually had enough money to buy a little grocery store in South Minneapolis, 33rd and 34th. They had a little mom and pop. Yeah, so then they began to prosper a little bit. Then I was in high school. I spent two years, roughly two years at Roosevelt High in South Minneapolis. You probably don't know that one, but if you know Jesse Ventura, he graduated from there.

CS: Oh, okay. Yeah.

WH: Yeah. He's younger than I am. *[Laughter]* Okay, so that's where my childhood went.

CS: Okay. Yeah, thank you for sharing that. Next, I would like to learn more about the values shared by your family and your neighbors. Values are principles or standards that help guide behavior. What memories come to mind that demonstrate what these values were for your family and your neighborhood?

WH: Yeah. Well, so back in those days, they used to send us home for lunch, or you could go home for it. I don't know if they had lunch at school or not. I had a friend, [Larry Lunefski], and I used to hang out with him. I used to go home with him. We'd watch *Casey Jones*. We'd have a sandwich and a glass of milk and cookies. He'd drag me home, and his mom would feed me. *[Pause 34:14-34:23]* That was a—because they knew there was nobody home at my place and probably nothing to eat there. I don't know. Then so that kind of value, whenever I meet people, I invite them home for supper. I'm very generous when it comes to my food. Yeah, so that had a very good impact on me because my wife and I, we go to church, and we're always inviting people over for church. There's no color segment about who gets invited. We've had—I don't know—over 30 people living in our house at various times. Some of them are from Russia. Some of them are from Ecuador. Some of them are from Korea. Some of them are from—did I say Ecuador? Yeah, I said Ecuador, Korean, Vietnamese. I had some Vietnamese boy here. We have a lot of African American people here. One family we took in, and we had some Mexicans, too. The one she was trying to hide from her husband. He was being very abusive. We took them in.

They lived with us for I don't know how long, three, four months totally. The home [*crying 36:23-36:28*]—

CS: Oh, take your time.

WH: [*Pause 36:30-36:36*] My wife and I, she's been big part of that, too. She's very open to having people here. They don't have to look like us, don't have to smell like us, don't have to eat like us. Yeah, so I guess when I look back, that's why I think that was a [*crying 37:07-37:12*] special time because there was a lot of kindness shown to me by people that were not white. There was never—yeah, just saying that. Yeah, so even though there was issues and struggles during that time of my life, that part I feel like is like gold because it put into my heart a love for people that don't look like me. [*Crying 38:03*] Sorry.

CS: No, that's okay.

WH: You know, yeah. The one thing I struggle with is people that have a definition of people that they don't know anything about. You don't know anything about anybody until you live with them, and you see what they're like. I live with all these people. They live with me. We did help. They did help me. Yeah. I think that was a seed that was implanted in me because of all the [*crying 38:59-39:11*]—because of all the kindness shown to me. The Neighborhood House down there was great. Excuse me.

CS: No, you're okay.

WH: We used to have Christmas celebrations. I was in a choir down there, singing Christmas songs. I got to get out of that family situation a lot. Sometimes it was good. It's not always bad. I don't want to paint my picture black, a depressing scene. It was good at times. A lot of good times. Yeah. It's just—yeah.

CS: Yeah. I mean, without putting words in your mouth, it sounds like you really took to hear the lessons of generosity and just unconditional kindness.

WH: Yeah. I would say that. Yeah.

CS: Yeah. Now I'm going to move to a little bit of a lighter subject hopefully. Now I'm going to ask you all about leisure time. Describe some of the ways in which you, your family, and your neighbors engaged in leisure time when you were growing up.

WH: Well, I don't know if I—well, mom and dad did go up north to visit where they grew up, to where mom or my dad grew up, up in Karlstad, Strandquist area. That's that Northwest part of the state that wanted to exit the State of Minnesota. They did at one time because all those people up there, they're all different. My grandparents came from Sweden. They were giving away land here, and so they had a sponsor. You had to have a sponsor here. My grandmother was a sponsor, or her parents were the sponsor to my grandfather. That's how he got here, and then when he got here, he married her. Then he tried to farm. He wasn't much of a farmer. [*Laughter*] Then we would go—my mom had a sister. We would go to her house for Christmas a lot of times and Thanksgiving. She was always kind to us. Yeah, so that's some of the family things. Then some of the part of my mom's side, they were kind to us. They knew, I think, what was going on in the family. A lot of times, they would come down and either pick up my brother or I. My sister's older. She's about 10 years older than me. She's gone now, but yeah. I lived with them for a

while, too, my mom's nephew. Yeah, so it'd be my sister—her sister's son. I lived with him and his wife for I don't know how long. I think my brother and I both lived there for a while because of what was going on in the family. The relationships with other parts of the family were pretty good. Yeah. We got to meet them anyways, and we got to fellowship with them. Then dad's side, well, he had his brothers. They were all crooks. There was my dad, and then his other brother Marvin, and then Oscar, his other brother, and then there was a couple of guys—I think I mentioned that before—that he hung around with. They would do stuff. Railroad cars, you know. Yeah, anyways, but then they also did siding, and I've heard a lot of stories about him. Anyways, so that was my dad's side. They drank a lot. A lot of drinking, a lot of drinking. Mom would *[unintelligible 44:13]* them. I'd lay in bed. My—*[Pause 44:22-44:28]*My brother and I would—we'd lay in bed, and we'd hear the stuff that's going on. Sometimes we'd hear my mom saying, "Wally, leave me alone. I'm telling you, leave me alone. Leave me alone." Next thing we'd hear is crack. She'd break a *[bottle 44:48]*. Back in those days, milk bottles came in real glass, half-gallon size, about that size. Wasn't the first time. Wasn't the last time either, but yeah. Where was I going with that? Did I get off track?

CS: Oh, no. That's fine. You were just telling a story about your leisure time with your family and—

WH: Oh, okay.

CS: - from your childhood.

WH: The leisure time with the family, that—I don't know. There must have been some fun in there. I don't know. Well, when we'd go up north. Most of my leisure and fun time was at the Neighborhood House and then at my friends'. There were a *[Varilla]* family that had a dozen Mexican kids, and we'd go there and hang out in their backyard. Their backyard was like a jungle, cars everywhere, iron everywhere. Yeah. Then we lived down by Holman Field, so we experienced the floods now and then, too. I'd get a bow and arrow, and we'd go shoot the carp that got trapped in there. Yeah, they had a lot of junkyards down there, too. They loved to go to junkyards, though. Anyway—

CS: Next, let's discuss your experience with schooling. Please describe what it was like going to school as a child.

WH: You know, it must have been somewhat positive. I don't remember anything negative happened at school. I was a patrol boy at one time. Yeah. I got a picture of that someplace. I don't know where. No. School seemed to be great. I don't have any negative things to say about school. I got along with the kids, I think, pretty well. I don't know. I don't really have much to say about that. The only thing was when I was in first grade, I think it was, when I was at the Catholic school, those nuns are tough, man, because I was misbehaving. A nun—whack right on the knuckles, and then she'd grab me by the ear and take me down to the Father's place, and I'd have to sit there all day. Yeah, they were tough. That's okay. It was good. I needed it. I deserved it. *[Laughter]* Didn't kill me, so taught me respect.

CS: Yeah. For our final topic, I'm going to ask you to reflect on local and global issues, such as war, poverty, discrimination, social unrest, et cetera. In your opinion, what were some of the

biggest local or global issues affecting the people in your neighborhood when you were growing up?

WH: [*Pause 48:05-48:17*] As far as the social part—again, this is my take on it—I felt like between the Catholic Church, the Jewish ladies that funded—I assume they funded the Neighborhood House, ‘cause there’s lots of Neighborhood Houses here in St. Paul. That was part of the social structure. As far as I was concerned, it was great, positive. Then we would also have—like I mentioned before, we had Christmastime. I was in a choir through the Neighborhood House. I can’t imagine Jewish people singing Christmas songs, but it must have been run by Catholics or something. I don’t know. Then the other social structure was the Festival of Nations that were held there at that Neighborhood House. I’d go to pow wows in there, and then they’d have all this food from all their peoples’ group. The only things that were really destructive or disruptive was when the Gypsies would come to town, and they would stay down there. Some of them were good, but a lot of them were not. Especially my brother says this. That’s why you need to get his intake on it. He seems to have more remembrance of that than I do, but I just remember that kids just walking in a store and walking out with half the store. They were not—yeah, I don’t know if they were poor, or they just liked to steal. I suppose if I was racist, I might be towards them ‘cause as far as I knew, they didn’t necessarily belong to the neighborhood. They just came there and stayed I don’t know for how long. I think sometimes a month, maybe two, and then they’d be gone, but yeah. That’s—

CS: Were they traveling and selling some things that they collected or—

WH: You know what, that part I don’t know. They could have, but I know that all the—my brother told me that all the merchants in the area were very careful about who came into their stores. I think the parents might have been okay, but the kids were just crazy. That’s the way my brother tells me. I suppose if that would be, I’d say—that was the most destructive or thing that I would remember going on. As far as between the other races that I grew up with, as far as I’m concerned, there was none. There was no racism. There was no racism in school. There was just, “Here’s your lessons.” Teach the kids, teach them. That’s what it was. That’s why I struggle with all the stuff that’s going on today, and I think back on my childhood. It’s like I didn’t have a white upbringing. I mean, I was brought up with the nations. I don’t have one thought pattern or one group pattern or whatever that is. Yeah, there was a lot of white people in my life, but there was also a lot of mixed people in my life. Even now today, the church I go to, I go to Bethel Christian Fellowship. We have people from the Himalayas. We have people from South Sudan. We have people from—well, a lot of Blacks. I can’t think of it. Congolese. That’s it. We have large Congolese families, Eritrea families. We all go to church together. Back then I didn’t know anything about anything, but now I know that when Christ comes into your life, you can change. He will change your heart as to the nations and what they’re like and not have one tunnel vision about who’s right and who’s wrong and who should be saved and who shouldn’t be saved. God wants us all to be saved. He wasn’t white. I like your cats.

CS: Oh, thanks.

WH: Yeah. I’m glad they’re not in my house. I would be having an asthma attack.

CS: Oh, yeah.

WH: Yeah. I'm allergic to them big time.

CS: Oh, okay.

WH: Yeah, so—

CS: Okay. Did you have any more that you would like to reflect on for the local and global issues, or is that pretty much what you can remember for that?

WH: That's pretty much what I remember. That character Gaston, he was a—I don't know if he was a kingpin down there or if he was a—but he was important to that neighborhood. I don't know all that surrounded him, but I just know that he was important to that neighborhood. He was a Black guy.

CS: Yeah, I'm curious—

WH: I think his son is still around. I don't know if you've heard that name before, but—

CS: This is the end of our interview. Your responses are invaluable, and we really appreciate that you took the time to do this today. Thank you so much for participating.