

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Westlake Terrace

Personal Experience

O.H. 868

ROMELIA CARTER

Interviewed

by

Joseph Drobney

on

November 4, 1985

D: This is an interview with Romelia Carter for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Westlake Terrace, by Joseph Drobney, on November 4, 1985, at Hagstrom House, in the Westlake project, at approximately 10:00 in the morning.

Miss Carter, could you tell me a little bit about your earliest years, perhaps about your family, your father and mother, how many brothers and sisters you had, when and where you were born, things like that?

C: I think it is important that Westlake Terrace becomes part of the historical register because these are some of the finest built projects in the nation.

I was born in 1934 on the east side of Youngstown. My parents moved the family to 602 Covington Street in 1937. I had three brothers and no sisters. There were four children in the family. In 1965, my oldest brother passed away, so now I still have my two brothers and my mother and father.

D: You mentioned in 1937 you were born, and then you moved to 602 Covington. During this time in the early 1940's and into the war years, do you remember much about your father? Did he have a job? What kind of work did he do?

C: You have to remember in 1937 I was three years of age. I do recall a part of moving to the lower north side on Covington Street. I can remember when the movers brought in the first radio that we had. I remember the first living room set my parents bought; I remember the delivery men when they brought it. I can also remember many things, playing hopscotch on the lower north side. I also remember starting school. I remember going to 20 West Wood. That was where the Board of Education was then. I remember going to Wood Street. Then I remember starting school at Butler. We had 1C at that time, 1B, and 1A. 1C was simply kindergarten. That was when we had two school semesters. You did not have a whole school year like you have now. You had January graduation; you had January entry into the schools, and you had September entry into the schools and June graduations. My birthday fell on January first, so January 1, 1941, I started Butler School in 1C. If my birthday had fallen in September, or perhaps late August, I would have started 1C in 1941 in January. Then, by September 1941, Covington School was completed. Then my class went into Covington School.

D: Did they close down Butler School? What happened to Butler School?

C: No, they did not close down Butler School because there were enough students in that particular area to continue going to Butler.

D: Where exactly are we talking about?

C: We are talking about the River Bend area, which at that time, was referred to as the Monkey's Nest. It is called River Bend Industrial Park area now.

- D: You were among the first students to move into the new Covington School?
- C: Yes.
- D: Of course, we are talking 1940, 1941, when you first began school. You were living on Covington. Do you have any memories at all about the construction, big machines coming in over at the Westlake area?
- C: There were not very many big machines in those days. A lot of work was done with the pick and shovel. As preschool children, we would watch them day in and day out as they built Covington School. Westlake Terrace, as well.
- D: Both things were going on at the same time?
- C: As far as I know. I can recollect Covington School because we were so small at that time, we were allowed to go as far as the house to Covington School. I know that this building was completed or started in 1939.
- D: The Hagstrom House?
- C: The Hagstrom House, which was formerly the Lexington Settlement.
- D: In those early years, at about the time you were six or seven, you began at Butler and then went on to Covington School. Do you remember much about the neighborhood and general area? Was it ethnically mixed? Was it mixed as far as occupations and things like that?
- C: It was ethnically mixed. Ethnics were all around us at that time. I can recall Croations living in the area; I can recall Greeks living across the street and in back of us. The only ones I can remember were the Greeks. I did not know many of the Italians. There may have been, but I do not recall those. I do recall the Croatians; they were Catholic. St. Peter and Paul has been in my neighborhood ever since I can remember. They were of Croatian descent, and they were scattering. Blacks and whites lived all together at that time. Greeks were prominent in the area.
- D: Going into the war years in the late 1930's and early 1940's, where exactly would you say was the concentration of blacks? It seemed that Youngstown was very much of a mixed town.
- C: It was.
- D: Were there any specific areas that were called the black areas?

- C: No, not that I can recall. Even up to the 1950's, there was nothing that was necessarily all black, or all Italian, or all Greek, to my knowledge. I know that the lower North side had a combination of persons or combination of ethnic background.
- D: Your early years at Covington School would have been during World War II. Was the school population mixed?
- C: Yes.
- D: A lot of kids from the projects?
- C: Yes.
- D: What are your first memories, as far as the completed projects? How do you remember them, as far as what they looked like, how they were kept up, things like that?
- C: My earliest remembrance of the projects was that they represented a nice, clean kind of place to live. Also, one of the things that sticks out in my mind is that they were compact and warm. Very, very warm. That was important at that time because we were having harsh and cold winters.
- D: During this time, in the war years, in the early 1940's did you have friends over there?
- C: Friends, by all means. We had friends and family. Family lived there and cousins. Lots of cousins lived in the projects. You were really a cool kid if you lived in the projects because, first of all, you were in a place that was warm and it had the feeling of being tight and secure. As odd as it may seem today, the projects were segregated. Westlake was segregated. Blacks lived in the lower section and whites lived in the upper section. You are in the upper section now. All blacks lived in the lower section. That seems so far away, but it was actually in existence.
- D: I have heard this from many of the previous black people that we had interviews with.
- C: It is true.
- D: They went from basically mixed neighborhoods, into this federally funded project, which, in the early years, was segregated. Did you, living there on Covington, take note of the fact that south of Madison was all black?
- C: Obviously it was a fact.
- D: Did you ever, either as a girl, or since being associated with the YMHA (Youngstown Metropolitan Housing Authority) find, at the root of that, international segregation? Was

it a YMHA policy? Was it a federal policy? Was it, perhaps, the policy of one or two individuals?

C: It was a national policy.

D: Do you feel that this may have come down from the federal government, rather than just from the people associated with the Youngstown Metropolitan Housing Authority?

C: I do not even know where it came from. Around the same time period other things were occurring. We also had to sit downstairs in the Palace Theater, and upstairs in the Warner Theater. The theaters were segregated.

D: Again, we are talking about through the war years, through the 1940's.

C: Right.

D: I understand Youngstown was kind of a ballroom entertainment town in the 1930's and 1940's. Was there a particular kind of ballroom or nightclub that blacks mainly went to?

C: Nu-Elms Ballroom, up on Elm Street.

D: Where the university is now?

C: In that vicinity, yes. Those were good years. I recall during those years, my brothers and I graduated from Rayen School. My brother graduated in 1948. Blacks did not go to your junior and senior prom.

D: This was at the Rayen School?

C: Blacks did not go in those years. One thing about the black community in those years was that it was a very solid community. It supported all of its young people. The age of consent was twenty-one years of age. Each year that black kids did graduate, or those who did not have to drop out and go to work to help support families, graduated from Rayen School. We had a dance promoter by the name of Clarence King. He sponsored all of, what was referred to then as, our June prom. The June prom was designed for the black community, to pay homage to the graduates from all over the city, for young people who did scuffle out the twelve years and graduate. The June prom was a large, black community even. Black adults and small black children went to the June prom to pay homage and respect to those blacks who did graduate.

D: Through the 1940's and into the 1950's, was it kind of rare or, indeed a very special thing, that a young black person actually went through twelve years of school?

C: The classes were not two or three hundred students. The classes may have been eight from South, eight from Rayen, eight from East, eight from North, whatever. Whatever it was or however many it was, the June prom was a large event for the black community. The June prom meant that all the young folks who had on white suits made it; they graduated. All of the young boys who had on the navy blue suits and white ties had made it. The black community came out in full force in total support of those young people who had made it. However, 1948 was the last one that I can recall, because that was when my brother graduated. My parents went to the June prom. All folks sixteen and older packed Nu-Elms Ballroom to pay special homage to those young graduates. While I was growing up on the lower north side, young black people were something special. Kids were something special. Black folks took care of black children. You had six or eight mothers and fathers. Everybody in that community was allowed to discipline you. When you did well, they stuck by you, and they stuck by you regardless. Communities were much tighter.

I can recall that we did not have a telephone. I think it had to be somewhere around 1946 or 1947 when my family finally did get a telephone. We had one telephone in the neighborhood. The Ages lived right next door to us for years and years; and they had the first telephone in the community. Everybody used the first telephone. I recall the Olson's had the first television in the community. Everybody watched that television.

D: During the 1940's, as you were becoming a young woman and eventually getting into high school, was Covington still basically a mixed area?

C: Yes, when I went to high school. I think I went to Hayes in 1946, in the September class. You could see from the whole picture, how many whites and how many blacks, just how mixed it was. One of the things that I do remember is that the same kids I went to Covington School with were the same kids I went on to Hayes School with, and in some cases, on to Rayen. By the time we got to Rayen in the class of 1952, it started to dwindle out a little. Jewish kids began to go to private schools, some of them, and some of the ethnic whites who lived here in the projects, as it was getting better for their parents, began to move out.

D: Perhaps you can confirm this. It seemed that, originally, the requirements were very strict to live here. You had to have married, or it seems that most people had to be married.

C: Or widowed, or divorced. Upon entry into Westlake Terrace, you had to bring the necessary papers for the office. If you were divorced, you had to bring the divorce papers. If you had three children, you had to bring three birth certificates. If you were widowed, you had to bring the death certificate of the husband or wife, whichever. Once that took place, then the rules and regulations were, if you had three children, and you lived in Westlake, and you had a fourth child, then you had to leave. That was the way it was.

- D: You could not have had a child out of wedlock while at Westlake and continue.
- C: To live here- No, you could not do that.
- D: Again, we are talking about the first ten, twelve, fifteen years of existence?
- C: Right. You could not do that. You were allowed to have a house guest, which was family, for a two week period. Back in those days, when the inspection took place, if there were a man's shoes there, man's jackets, that was okay, because you had a two week visiting period. Beyond that two weeks, if those man's shoes were there and there was no man's name on your lease, then they would not allow that.
- D: As far as what you remember, were these inspections kept up during this period? They did check into that?
- C: They were absolutely checked. There was a lady called Mrs. Knauf who did the actual checking.
- D: What was her position? I have heard so much about her.
- C: I do not know if she was called inspector, or if she was called housing director. Things were so much different then.
- D: How about income requirements at the time? Did a person during the 1940's need to show that they had a tangible income coming in?
- C: Yes.
- D: As you were growing up in the 1940's, what type of federal relief system was in operation at that time?
- C: It was called Allied Council. This agency, Associated Neighborhood Centers, goes back sixty-nine years. We were part of the Allied Council and the Humane Society, along with Children and Family Services. They had a huge dock at Children and Family Services where they passed out commodities to families who needed them. Associated Neighborhood Centers, at that time, was a part of that.
- D: Was this actually federal funding, or was this a big, private organization?
- C: It was federal. I am sure it was federal because, on the local level, we were not into all of that.
- D: Of course, you began your school career during the war years. After World War II was

over, did you notice if there was any type of change at Westlake, as far as new people coming, or young veterans coming into the project?

C: Yes. Fellows coming back from World War II had no homes. Many of them had no jobs. That is when race became really sticky.

D: What do you mean by that?

C: I can recall, after the war, on the east side.

D: Of Youngstown?

C: Yes. The federal government put up homes for returning veterans.

D: Do you remember the names of those homes? Was this a federally funded project?

C: Yes. Black returning veterans were not allowed to live there. They were highly upset because they fought in World War II. Then they came back home and there were no houses for them. They would not allow them to live there.

D: Do you happen to remember some of the streets around this place on the east side?

C: Back around Akinson Avenue. It runs off of Bennington Avenue. Those veterans' houses were out in that area.

D: I take it most of the east side was either mixed or mainly white at this time.

C: I do not know an awful lot about the east side, but the lower east side has always been blacks and Italians to the best of my knowledge. A few Italians still live there on the east side. I was born on Rose Street, which runs adjacent to Wilson Avenue, one of the short streets. When my dad entered the Mahoning Valley, he settled on the east side. We lived from Franklin Avenue to Rose Street, all in that lower east side area.

D: In the late 1940's you were at Hayes and getting ready to go to the Rayen school?

C: In September, 1949, I went to Rayen, in the tenth grade.

D: We are getting into the late 1940's. Is it still, north of Madison Avenue, white and south of Madison Avenue, black? Can you remember when that began to change?

C: I cannot remember exactly when that began to change. No. It had to be somewhere in that time.

- D: I believe it was around 1951, 1952, 1953.
- C: Probably around that time period.
- D: Most of the people you knew as you were going through school, did they end up moving out of the Westlake project sometime in the late 1940's or early 1950's? Did you know a lot of people who spent years and years there?
- C: Most of them moved out as their parents' economic situation got better. The more money you made, the more rent you had to pay. Youngstown, in my estimation, in those years, was becoming a definite homeowners town. Everybody who was worth their weight in salt had desires to own their own home, and they worked toward that end.
- D: Was there still an income cap on how much you could make?
- C: There is one now.
- D: Do you know if the income cap was enforced?
- C: By all means, yes. Once a year you had a rent review. They called it a rent review.
- D: You graduated when?
- C: June of 1952.
- D: Would you say that your graduating class was, perhaps, substantially more black than six or seven years prior?
- C: Of course. The class of 1952 graduating from Rayen had fifty-four blacks to graduate. That was the highest number Rayen had ever graduated, in terms of blacks.
- D: The highest number of blacks?
- C: Yes. That year we decided that we were going to attend every activity for graduating seniors. We went to the prom; we went to the senior picnic; we went to the baccalaureate services; we went to the religious services, all fifty-four of us. We were getting a little more sophisticated back in those days. We had a larger number to work with. That year we decided that when it came time to vote for queen and king, we were going to vote for one black king and one black queen. As a result, we did that. All of us and our dates voted for just one black. The black came out in second place. That year we came out first, second and third.
- D: You mentioned that in 1952, there was the largest number of blacks, as far as a

graduating class, at that time. Would you say that the construction and then the occupation of Westlake project, especially south of Madison Avenue, had greatly contributed to the number of blacks in the entire area that Rayen would service? Would you say that, previous to the construction of Westlake, that Youngstown was very much a mixed town? When Westlake was constructed, although it was not originally intended to be, within a few years, did it not become a major center of the black population in Youngstown?

- C: Yes. As the economic ladder for whites began to move up, why, of course. If whites are moving up, blacks are moving up, also, but not at the same rate. Whites are moving up and out. Blacks are moving up and out, also, but not at the same rate or at the same level. In 1952 there was one of the longest steel strikes that this valley has ever known. After that, we started going into recession. The white community of Youngstown may have known a few hardships, but the black community was in a recession. We have been in a recession more years than we care to remember. Once we go into a Depression, then the white community goes into a recession. Then in 1953, after the steel strike was over, the men went back to work. In 1953, 1954, 1955, and 1956, we were becoming young married couples at that time. I was married in 1955. I can remember 1956, when my ex-husband would be on for a year, and then off two weeks, and back on for a month, and then off. Steel mills were getting real raunchy then. They were laying the ground work for what we see today in this valley. I can recall my brother was off for two and a half years. Another young married friend of mine, who had a family, her husband would work one year and be off two years. This was like 1956, 1957, and 1958.
- D: Getting into the 1950's, after you graduated in 1952. You married in 1955?
- C: 1955, yes.
- D: During this time, at Westlake, did you begin to note a definite change in the type of people who were moving into Westlake, or the way Westlake was being administered or kept up? Did you begin to notice any significant changes?
- C: Around those particular years, slight change, yes, but not significant.
- D: It seems from about 1940 into the 1950's the original idea, as you helped to point out, is young married couples are looking for a first home, or a first permanent place. When they had saved up, or had gotten enough money, they were on their way to their new home.
- C: On their way to buy their own homes, right.
- D: At the same time, we have the administration, the YMHA, being very strict as far as checking on people, making sure Westlake was a good place to live, making sure that

things were being done properly, and keeping the place up. When did you begin to note that this pattern began to alter?

C: By 1965, the entire project here was black. By 1965 it was all black. Then, by 1967, I noticed a real sincere change. I began to notice the change to the point where it was conscious in my mind.

D: At the time you were still living at Covington?

C: Yes.

D: So you were still observing Westlake as a nearby neighbor.

C: Yes. Westlake has always been a neighbor to those of us on Covington, Foster, and George. It was just within a stones throw.

D: Was a large majority of the black population which moved in between the early 1950's and the mid-1960's coming from other parts of Youngstown, or coming from outside the city? Did you get any feel for this or hear anything about it?

C: They came from all over. In my opinion, a portion was migration from other states or other cities. Another portion was the children of the people who I went to school with. They were now of age to have married and move into the project for their first temporary home, if all went well. All did not go well. If all went well, they would have been the children of the folks I went to school with, or who went to school with my brother. I saw a change, in particular, around 1965. I began to notice a change, not substantial, in 1962. It was a little more substantial in 1965, and there was a terrific change from 1967 to today.

D: Around the time when you got married, the mid-1950's, was there beginning to be a slight change, although not an overwhelming one?

C: Yes.

D: By the mid to late 1950's, had the integration of the projects--blacks being able to move north of Madison Avenue--become well underway?

C: Yes. By 1955, as best as I can recollect, the entire project was black, north and south of Madison Avenue.

D: You are saying that probably within five, six, possibly seven years after the integration process began, there were very few, if any whites left?

- C: Very few, yes.
- D: Did you kind of hear people tell of this massive, intentional, white exodus? Did people talk about it? Was it a noticeable thing?
- C: They did not only talk about it, they did it. Politics were very funny in this town at that time. The removal of the River Bend area was politically motivated, in my opinion. I can recall, prior to my getting married, there was what they called a Third Ward Voters League. We had not been able to have a black councilman in this ward since then, since Mr. McCoullugh Williams was a councilman here. The primary job of the Third Ward Voters League was to groom and manicure young, black precinct committee people. There were six hundred votes just in the River Bend area alone, which was also part of the Third Ward.
- D: This was the Monkey's Nest?
- C: Yes. In that area, young precinct committee members were groomed and manicured. They were able to produce six hundred votes. Six hundred people of voting age, and six hundred voters came out to vote. That was the year we elected a black councilman. Around that time, the Brier Hill area was primarily Italians.
- D: Even into the 1950's, it is primarily Italian?
- C: Right, the whole Brier Hill area. When you think of here and when you think of the River Bend area, you had to say to yourself, "What can we do politically?" That was the year we elected a black councilman. We were politically conscious, and we acted.
- The politicians thought they had to do something. When you looked at the other section of the north side of the Third Ward, you would see one house with mother and father in it, and it sits on two acres of land. When you looked down here, you had two houses of votes on one acre of land. Naturally with all of that combined, you are going to have good politics, if the folks vote. They politically motivated themselves, and they moved out to the River Bend area. They tore down the entire Monkey's Nest, and the scattered those folks.
- D: What do you mean by "they"? Was this something done in the 1950's by the city?
- C: Yes. A. B. Flask, who can ever forget him?
- D: This tearing down of many of the homes in the Monkey's Nest, did this come under the title of urban renewal?
- C: Urban renewal. We called it instant black removal, but it was called urban renewal.

- D: Where did those people go?
- C: They scattered to the south side of Youngstown and a few scattered to the north side of Youngstown. By then the whites who were living on Fairgreen, on Delaware--the ethnic whites like the Polish and the Croatians--began to move to Liberty, Boardman and Austintown.
- D: In the Monkey's Nest area in the 1950's, there was a massive project underway by the city with federal funds to kind of wipe out the residents who were there.
- C: They did wipe them out, not kind of; they did wipe them out.
- D: Then the black residents, obviously, had to go someplace else in the city, and where they went, the whites moved out?
- C: Right. My cousins locally, in 1955 or thereabouts, decided they wanted to build a house on the east side of Youngstown. They went to the local banking institution and this guy had so much confidence in himself, that he told my cousin straight up he could not give him money to build a new house, because he did not know who was going to buy the homes that the white people left. My cousin had to go to Pittsburgh. That was where his loan came from. I am saying my cousin, because I am close to his family. Many, many young blacks in that era had to go to Cleveland or Pittsburgh, to get loans to build new homes, and they built homes on the northeast side of town.
- D: During the 1950's was really the only time that the south side and parts of the east side really began to become the major concentration of black population?
- C: It was designed for that. Those who were in the market for houses, who were coming out of the Monkey's Nest, would look at a five room house--two bedrooms, living room, dining room, kitchen--on the north side and look at a house on the south side. On the south side it was \$3,000 to \$5,000 cheaper than it was on the north side.
- I can remember when the anti-poverty program was getting underway in Youngstown in 1965. It opened on the south side first. It took us a long time to get an anti-poverty center on the north side at that time, because the mayor himself was chairman of the anti-poverty program. He lived on the north side himself.
- D: This is who?
- C: A. B. Flask. He said that there was no poverty on the north side of Youngstown. You had two housing developments at that time on the north side of Youngstown. This one and Brier Hill, plus the senior citizen area on Burlington Avenue, which was all part of the Third Ward, and part of the north side. How can you sit there and say that there was no poverty on the north side, and there was no need for an anti-poverty center on the

north side, unless you have a vested interest? They finally got a center on the north side of Youngstown with OEO funds.

D: OEO?

C: Office of Economic Opportunity, and the anti-poverty program fell under that. It took the Catholics from Gillette House, and Reverend Morris Lees, who had just come to town, to get the mayor to change his mind. We had two huge housing projects on the north side, and he is going to say there is no poverty on the north side.

D: About how long was Flask in office?

C: He was heading for his fourth term. He probably would have made it if it was not for the incident at Stop Five. That was during the steel strike. One of the young truck drivers was killed at Stop Five. They found out that the city of Youngstown supplied a police escort for a convoy coming from Teamster Drive, which is right over here by the board of education's warehouse. One of the Youngstown police supplied the escort that led to Stop Five. It was like an entourage, headed in principal, by Youngstown police, and the young truck driver was wounded and killed. That, in my opinion, was the only thing that killed A. B. Flask, in terms of being mayor.

D: Getting back to Westlake during the 1950's, when the homes in the Monkey's Nest were taken out as a result of urban renewal, how was the actual administration of the Westlake housing project? I am talking about the situation of enforcing codes as far as types of people who were allowed to live in the project, about having to show a marriage license, and enforcing the general maintenance codes of the entire project. Can you recall the deterioration of these standards, and perhaps what caused it? Can you recall any definite date or time? I am talking about the YMHA having constant inspections, making sure that apartments were kept up, making sure that people were not having men friends over. Was there a three or four or five year period when suddenly this was just not done anymore?

C: As the national laws changed, the housing development had to go along with them. It became unconstitutional for you to walk into my house and check whether I am cleaning it or not. I am sure that the administration had to go along with some of that. I do not know how much they had to go along with it, but I do know that when the Right to Privacy Act was enacted, I think in 1975 or 1976, it said that they could no longer judge whether you had two children or three that year, or one next year or two next year. A lot of that has changed. That is where we are today.

D: How about the economic profile of the people as we get into the 1950's and early 1960's? Originally it seemed like everybody had to have a job, because the way the federal subsidies were then, it seems like the only way you could pay the rent was to have a job.

How about as we are getting into the late 1950's and into the 1960's? How about the economic profile of Westlake? Is it changing drastically?

C: By the middle of the 1960's we had begun to make a substantial change, because most of them were welfare recipients. They were mothers whose husbands had walked off, or left for various reasons. They were widowers; they were widows. You had men now who had no wives, who lived in the projects by themselves. You had to include the disabled, too. You had veterans who were disabled and could not work, and they also qualified for the project.

The federal laws had a lot to do with some of the change. I never lived in the project. I was never subject to the lease agreements. I was not subject to those kinds of things. I am telling you about the legal part from friends and relatives who were part of the legal part of the projects. I was not.

D: How about what was going on around Westlake on the whole in the late 1950's and early 1960's? We have already talked about the south side when blacks began moving into that area. When did things like blacks having to sit in certain parts of the theater, and remnants of outright discrimination, begin to wear itself, at least out of official businesses in Youngstown?

C: I can remember Future Outlook League of Cleveland, Ohio coming to Youngstown to help us eliminate the problems in the theaters.

D: When are we talking about?

C: We are talking about 1946, 1947, 1948.

D: Right after the war.

C: Yes, we are talking about right after the war. I remember their part in helping. I was quite young, but I have always been active. I remember them coming. They had whites in their group. The Future Outlook League had whites as well as blacks. I do not know how it really happened. One of the white fellows from the Future Outlook League came to Youngstown and offered to buy a balcony ticket, I think, at the Palace Theater. The ticket seller refused to sell him a ticket for the balcony because his place was downstairs. He sued, and by suing, he won. Then, after that, they all opened up.

There was a time in the Isaly Dairy Plant, which is on Mahoning Avenue

D: On the corner of Mahoning Avenue and Glenwood.

C: Yes, Mahoning and Glenwood. The Isaly Dairy plant was upstairs, and they had a big cafeteria downstairs. Blacks could not sit in there and eat ice cream. I remember that. You could go in and stand at the counter and buy your ice cream cone, but you could not

buy it and sit down and eat a sundae.

D: We are talking during the 1940's, right?

C: You could not do that; I remember that.

D: You mentioned how, in 1952, you and the other black students who graduated from Rayen kind of took it upon yourselves that you were going to force a change of attitude, to a certain extent.

C: Right. We had the numbers; we had the will; we had the organization to do just that. Rayen, at that time, to the best of my knowledge, had never had first, second, or third king and queen, never. We believed some other things happened there. The teachers counting the ballots were aware enough to know that we were aware enough. When you are talking about one hundred and some votes to just two people, we probably took first place, but they were not ready for us to be first place. So we had first, second, and third. Your whole graduating class was only 205 students. Fifty-four of those were black. Just the statistics alone will tell you. If it is open season for king and queen.

D: Was this kind of a general movement in Youngstown in the five to ten years after World War II, in a way, a movement to get rid of the remnants of segregation within the city? Into the late 1950's and early 1960's, was there still outright discrimination in businesses, for example?

C: Sure. The NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) said to the banks at that time that if they did not desegregate and put some black tellers in our banks, they would withdraw our money. This is the late 1950's.

D: In the late 1950's there were no black tellers in banks?

C: No.

D: Even banks down in the general black areas?

C: No, no, no.

D: Were there any other types of jobs where you saw nothing but white faces?

C: They eventually started letting us run elevators, and that was considered a good job in the 1940's. If you were black and ran an elevator, it was considered a good job.

D: But nothing where you would be handling money or responsibility.

- C: I know who the first black female bank tellers were. They were there because their dad was very active in the NAACP. They told them if they did not, they were going to take their deposits out. Then they began to open the doors. Now you have them all over.
After graduation, in June of 1952, I went to work at Workingmen's Overall & Supply, as a tumbler.
- D: Which is right down in the Westlake area.
- C: Yes, right.
- D: Were there a lot of people from the Westlake area who worked in that Overall Supply?
- C: Not many. They came from across town. You always had that rent review. If you got your periodic raises, pretty soon you would work yourself out of the housing project. The housing project, at that time, was warm, compact, and safe in the middle of the people. There were neighbors right next door.
- D: You almost allude to a possibility that some people may have intentionally not advanced themselves economically so that they could remain in the housing project.
- C: For a period of years, that could have been their desire to stay there.
- D: How about in the mid-1950's?
- C: It changed in the mid-1950's because everybody wanted upward mobility.
- D: Is there a point in time in the 1950's that a black family may have considered Westlake to be preferable to any other part of Youngstown, even if they could own their own home in that part of Youngstown? You have alluded to this kind of warmth for the community in Westlake at this time.
- C: We are talking about 1939, 1940, 1941?
- D: Now we are into the 1950's.
- C: Upward mobility is the word go; it was the password. After 1955, to my recollection, or 1952, everything was upward mobile. After the Korean War, all blacks were going up there. All blacks had a desire to go up. In particular, after then, you started getting your housing subsidies.
- D: Loans and aid to help people buy their homes.
- C: Yes, right, and encourage them to buy. A lot of your single women or your divorcees or

widowers who lived in the project were able to get houses on section and 231 plan and all of those. They moved out of here then and proceeded to move up.

- D: Their moving out, who then are the people moving in, and where are they coming from? Are they coming from Youngstown only, do we still have people coming up from Alabama and South Carolina? Who exactly were the people replacing, people who could afford to move out in the late 1950's and early 1960's?
- C: It was the same kind of trend, like young married couples or a guy who works at Strauss and he works on a loading dock. He does not make the same money that a guy working in the mill would make.
- D: The guy working in the mill could have originally started in Westlake and, by now, he is gone.
- C: Gone, right. Your young married couples, again, your senior citizens. This area up in here used to be loaded with senior citizens.
- D: We are talking about north of Madison Avenue.
- C: There were lots of good seniors, widowers, whose husbands died in the 1940's. Their pensions were so small that all they could do was live there and do a little baby-sitting on the side. That was what they used to do. That was when everybody in the black community lived together. When there was not a prominence of nursing homes and rest homes. Seniors lived right along with babies, teen-agers, right along with young adults. There was a little area down here, north of Madison, a particular court that had a heavy sprinkling of seniors. South of the freeway, they were all seniors, at one time.
- D: I think we are both aware of some of theories about when a freeway is put in through a city that everything on either side of that freeway decreases in value. It just disrupts homes and everything.
- C: It disrupted homes, the whole bit. This area used to be full of voting citizens and homeowners.
- D: We are talking mid-1960's?
- C: Yes.
- D: That freeway, I believe, was built in 1965 or 1966.
- C: Yes.

- D: Tell me about the change, when it occurred.
- C: One of the local judges, Judge Haynes
- D: Who came out of the project.
- C: And he also lived on Covington Street. His family's old home was on Covington Street prior to the freeway. If you had at least six houses, you had a good thirty votes out of those six houses. It is amazing how they broke up the political block and how it was done. As we see it, when you talk about the Third Ward, it was done on purpose. I cannot speak for other wards, but I know about the Third Ward. It seems to have been done on purpose, for political reasons. When that freeway came through, it is amazing about these projects, to show you how well they are built, they took the whole area of Otis Street, which is over there, put them on a flatbed truck, and literally picked them up and moved them from out of the path of the freeway, and put them over there on Otis Street.
- D: So you are saying that nobody in the projects was actually misplaced?
- C: No.
- D: How about the general community, Covington and the community right around the project?
- C: Totally displaced.
- D: Again, where did they go?
- C: I know one man who had to leave his home. He moved up here on Delaware.
- D: When this occurred, were people given money by the federal government or the city to move? How did that work?
- C: Lots of games were played with homeowners. They did not know. This was all new to them. Eminent domain set in. They did not know what the heck eminent domain was. They used eminent domain to move folks just for the hell of it. I know the Williams'. One family moved three times. They moved from North Avenue to make room for the expansion of St. Elizabeth's Hospital, and from there to the corner of Covington and Parmalee. Then they were displaced again to make room for the mental health center, and the moved further up on Covington, where they were displaced again for the freeway. Now they live on the upper north side. They moved three different times. They had the desire to stay in the same area.

- D: Eventually you did go and get your master's degree from West Virginia, which I believe was in the mid-1970's?
- C: 1976.
- D: Did that event bring you back to Youngstown and to Hagstrom House here at Westlake?
- C: No, when I graduated from WVU (West Virginia University) in August of 1976, I became project director for Children & Family Services for the Youth Development Agency.
- D: We are talking about here?
- C: Yes. I became the project director of that. I stayed there two and a half years, until federal funds ran out. Then, in April of 1979, I came here and have been here until now.
- D: Who currently funds the activities here at Hagstrom House?
- C: The United Way.
- D: The United Way?
- C: Yes, we are a United Way agency.
- D: Is the Hagstrom House still officially part of the YMHA property?
- C: Yes.
- D: Do you have to pay rent? How does this work?
- C: We pay one dollar a year.
- D: One dollar a year? Who do you service?
- C: We service primarily project residents and also residents in the houses in the surrounding areas. It is a five block radius, north, south, east, or west in all directions.
- D: It is a general neighborhood situation?
- C: Yes. It is a settlement house really. We come under the Jane Adams auspices and the kinds of things she believed in. We are just not allowed to be as radical as Jane Adams was.

- D: Could you give me a profile of the average Westlake housing project resident here in 1985?
- C: The profile of the average Westlake resident is a GR person or an ADC person.
- D: What are we talking about with GR?
- C: General Relief, or an Aid for Dependent Children person, or disabled veterans or widowers or widows. That is the profile.
- D: Would you say that a family with a working father is indeed a scarcity?
- C: Yes, even a poor working father is a scarcity. There are a few families with fathers who are laid off, or who may work two days a week. What I just quoted to you is a general profile of the city of Youngstown now.
- D: From what you can gather talking to residents and the people you come in contact with, is it your impression that the YMHA is not doing what it can as far as keeping the buildings, keeping up the residences, making sure that things are done that used to be done thirty years ago, shoveling walks and cutting grass?
- C: In talking with the executive, we have to work pretty close together because I am in their building here, the executive tells me that money is a serious problem. They have labor problems with the organized labor here in their system.
- D: Where does YMHA money come from? Is it strictly from the federal government?
- C: As far as I know federal, and with some matching money from state and local, I am sure. But the primary bulk is federal. I am in need right now of a person to just really take care of this building. I do not have the money to put him on staff. Just talking to the executive from Housing, I told him what my need was. He does a terrific job keeping up this building. I need them to just pay this person. I would like to be able to pick the person, somebody who cares for the building, but she says that she does not have the money to pay him.
- D: This is at YMHA?
- C: Yes. He would not be assigned to take care of any other building in my area, under my umbrella, but this one. We need him worse than old folks need soft shoes. He is agile enough to do the kinds of things that need to be done in this building. He is old enough to be secure about a job, and he is just the right age to do a good job for me, and for the Housing Authority in terms of doing things in their building. I do the best I can with what I have to work with.

- D: Tell me about everything that Hagstrom House provides for the neighborhood, all of the various programs.
- C: We have a program for kids; we have an athletic program for unemployed men and women in the area; we have an athletic program for the youth and reading clubs; we have an excellent drill team--young girls in a drill team, and drill team B includes some boys now. We have a theater group. We have a multitude of things. A settlement house does everything from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. We have a fantastic senior citizens group; we provide transportation for senior citizens through the help of the local council on aging. There are so many programs that I cannot think of all of them right off hand.
- D: Are there other settlement houses associated with the other YMHA projects, or in general with the community?
- C: There was a time when Associated Neighborhood Centers had an umbrella of five centers. We used to have Kimmel Brook plus this one, plus Westlake. We also have Victory Annex, Brier Hill, and Clarence Robinson Center, which is on the south side of Youngstown. That was the only one that was not located in a housing development. As time went by and money got short, they all had to close. The agency fell into a recession. There were times when United Way did not even reach their goal, so they had to cut everybody back. By the time I came aboard in 1979, we were down to three centers. There were Kimmel Brook, this one, and Clarence Robinson. During my regime, because I had no money to hire additional female staff at Hanson Center, I could not leave two young, agile male workers there alone. We could not count on female volunteers at Kimmel Brook, so you did not expose your young men to possible suits. We had to close Kimmel Brook. Now the association is down to two, Clarence Robinson and Hagstrom House.
- D: Can you give me a specific list about the problems that are directly encountered here at the settlement house with Westlake project and the general area? Are we talking about drug abuse, kids hanging out on street corners, things like that?
- C: In my personal opinion, first of all, one young fellow down on that corner told me a few years ago that \$250,000 per week in drugs go on down at that corner. If he is out there and he knows this, and he is telling me this, where are the profits going? The profits are not being regenerated back into here. The only conclusion that I can come to is that it is highly profitable for someone outside of Westlake Terrace and the other communities of the like. Someone is benefiting tremendously, and it is expedient to keep that going. Where are they going? The poor, young fellows who push the drugs are pushing to get their own supply, because none of them are making out like a bandit, either. Then that means that the profits are going somewhere outside of this community.
- I have watched and every election there is a huge, floating crap game down here.

I know that some of the guys who sponsor the crap game do not live here. Why is it so important on election day? That huge crap game goes on so that these fellows cannot even get to the poles to vote. That is expedient again for somebody else outside of the immediate community. It behooves us to say to ourselves, "Who is running the crap game? Who is staking them, and why are they here?" The same people are also here on check day. Crap games are just humongous in calling the attention of young black males into something that is not profitable for them. They have not developed to the level where they can answer these kinds of questions that I am answering.

D: Do you have some type of education program here at Hagstrom House?

C: Sure, we have those kinds of education programs. We have to be very careful. If we educate too well, then we are discredited because it is to somebody else's advantage to make sure that we do not. We do not have the right staff; we do not have enough staff; we do not have the bucks to pay the people to come in and do that. It is necessary that we stay the way we are, because if we educate too many of them, then those on the outside who have a vested interest begin to say, "We cannot lose that."

Taking that blame and putting it there, there is another piece of blame that goes on us. It goes on the black community, and on the residents of Metropolitan Housing. We already know that the exterior can eat into the interior and cause the decay once it gets down to the core. There are certain things that we as black people have to take a responsibility for. Nobody is going to give you any freedom; you have to take it. You have to take it with a clear head and disregard all of the confusion. It is up to us to do something on our own now. A large part of the blame lies right with us. The largest part of the blame lies with the outside community.

D: What are the general hopes here at the settlement house? Are you trying to save that one in ten children from the Westlake project? Are you trying to improve the general environment?

C: An outside group of civic-minded black women are coming in to do what has to be done to help us. We cannot pay them because we do not have the funds to pay them, but they are willing to come in anyway. That is the kind of attitude that is going to help us. One in ten would take us too long. We would disintegrate dealing with one in ten in the next twenty years. We have got to set our hopes and goals for ten out of ten and do it, if we intend not to disintegrate.

D: Do you see that ten out of ten being helped here in the future?

C: We better.

D: I think that will pretty much be it. Thank you very much, Miss Carter.

End of Interview